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REVIEWED

STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO
[XB/PC]
KOF: MAXIMUM IMPACT
[PS2]
PROJECT: SNOWBLIND
[PS2/XB/PC]
MERCENARIES
[PS2/XB]
SUIKODEN IV
[PS2]
BAND BROTHERS
[DS]
DEAD OR ALIVE ULTIMATE
[XB]

REVIEW

RESIDENT EVIL 4

Capcom unleashes a truly shocking sequel

RETRO

LEMMINGS

The RSPCA wouldn't like it

180 PAGES - CAN YOU FEEL THE LOVE INSIDE?

TESTED

Redrawing the future of handheld gaming?

NINTENDO DS


eMag



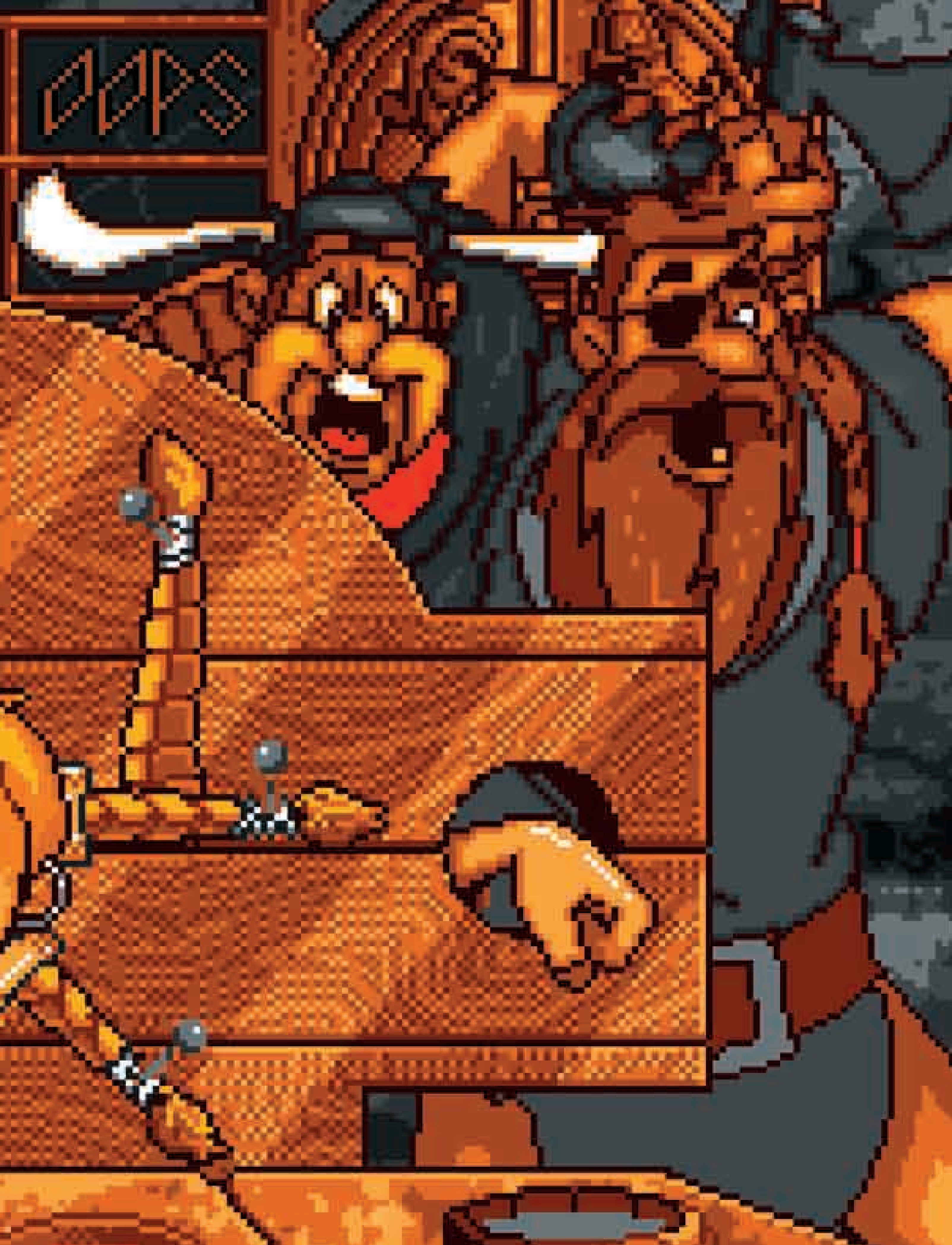
"Nintendo DS is ready to entertain more people than [any of] the other platforms can, regardless of their age, gender and whether or not they have ever played with videogames." So says Satoru Iwata.

According to Nintendo, the launch of the DS adds a third tier to its console strategy that is separate to its home consoles and Game Boy franchise. Perhaps, more importantly, the DS is a handheld that Nintendo hopes will expand the videogames market by appealing to hardcore gamers and newcomers alike.

There's no denying Nintendo's lofty aim in its pursuit of innovation over what it considers "linear extensions of videogame technology". But whether European gamers will respond to its latest handheld remains to be seen. With the PSP looming large – a machine that Sony also believes will capture a sizeable chunk of the non-games-playing public – Nintendo has to hope that we're ready to get touch-feely.

Simon Phillips,
Group Editor


NAME
GAMESTM
29
3
OLAF



CONTENTS

PREVIEWS

REVIEWS



RETRO





108

FEATURES



36 Pariah

Goodbye Unreal, hello Pariah – will Digital Extremes' new FPS have what it takes to dominate the competition?

REGULARS

NEWS

NEWS | INDUSTRY GOSSIP | OPINION



CONTENTS

FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

CRUNCH

The Electronic Arts corporate steamroller stepped up a gear last month, causing concern within the industry. The publishing giant signed a five-year deal with the NFL, made moves to acquire Digital Illusions, and bought shares in Ubisoft. It also put up the cash for a 15-year deal with ESPN for exclusive rights to the sports broadcaster's branding, taking the licence from rival sports publishing duo Sega and Take 2.

And it didn't stop there. Games website IGN claimed EA tried to broker a deal with the NBA for exclusive rights to its branding, players and team names but had the bid rejected. However, EA has said it made no such offer, with a spokesperson telling GamesIndustry.biz that "EA has not asked for an exclusive and the NBA has not rejected an EA offer for an exclusive."

Soon after quashing these rumours, EA had made another deal, this time with the AFL (Arena Football League) for exclusive rights to start a range of games based around this cut-down version of American football. The publisher doesn't just have exclusive game development rights, but also gets a financial interest in the league, which will see EA benefit from any future expansion.

Meanwhile, details regarding EA's plans to buy stock in Ubisoft have emerged. EA Europe boss Gerhard Florin says the 20 per cent share buyout was "not hostile". "Everyone thinks that we never had talks with Ubisoft," he said. "We spoke to Ubisoft, Activision, Eidos and a lot of other producers. We didn't only speak of acquisitions but also industrial partnerships." Ubisoft disagrees, though its chairman, Yves Guillemot, told a French radio station that he was ready to reject further advances. "We have a plan, which I cannot reveal, that will allow us to win in this matter," he said.

So will Ubisoft be able to withstand EA's might? Or is the games industry heading for a monopoly?

EA MOVES FORWARD WITH PLANS FOR GLOBAL DOMINATION TIME?


Sixty EA LA staff have been laid off recently.


EA's Larry Probst – could afford to buy all of Wales.


Is EA driving competition out of the market?

Photo © Pierre DuCharme/Reuters

BEHIND THE BUYING

IT HASN'T ALL BEEN PLAIN SAILING FOR EA, MIND…

SIXTY PLAYERS CUT FROM THE TEAM

Despite the events of previous months where a spotlight on EA's work practices uncovered a culture of long, hard hours for development teams (suggesting more staff may have been necessary), EA has felt the need to cut 60 jobs at its Los Angeles studio. Those staff made redundant were all developers spanning a variety of project teams. Non-development staff members have been left unaffected. EA's reasons for the job cuts are quite vague, with EA LA's studio manager Neil Young explaining that the cuts were designed to "rebalance the teams across the entire studio." Whatever that means…

SMALL REVENUE DECLINE, HIGHER PRICES?

Although it's the largest games publisher in the world, EA recently saw a sales decline of 3.2 per cent compared to the same period in the previous financial year. Its total revenue ended up at $1.43 billion compared to 2003-2004's $1.48 billion for the same quarter. However, the company's release schedule was smaller this time round, with just 11 titles released compared to 13 in the previous year. Still, EA seems keen to rectify this downward pattern, with these licence deals suggesting 2005 will be an important year for the publisher; with many new game brands certain to make an appearance for Q3 2005, there's bound to be a rise in revenue. If rumours are believed, EA also has releases planned for Xbox 2 as soon as November 2005, which will also prove to be an extra source of income – especially if talk about next-gen EA titles being more expensive is true. EA CEO Larry Probst was recently quoted as saying that "it would not surprise me to see selected titles carry a higher price point on new-generation consoles, at least initially."

OUR TWO CENTS

While other large publishers, such as Midway, have been expanding operations in recent months, none come close to matching the aggressive march of EA. Obviously, its move to acquire every high-profile sports licence in existence (despite refuting claims it tried to snag the NBA) is the most worrying set of manoeuvres, and it's seen Sega and Take 2 lose the ESPN licence that gave the pair any sort of competitive position. The fear is that sports games without the official branding that fans love so much will not be able to survive, and in this market EA is free to release wave after wave of annual updates without any significant improvement in quality. The same worries dog EA's moves to buy shares in Ubisoft and its own admission of having 'talks' with Activision and Eidos among others. Basically, the more EA acquires the harder it is for the competition. And without competition the quality of games suffers. As a result, there aren't many people outside EA who thinks the deals and buyouts are good news.

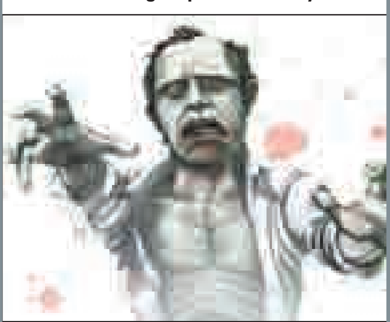
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



KUJU: LIVING OR DEAD

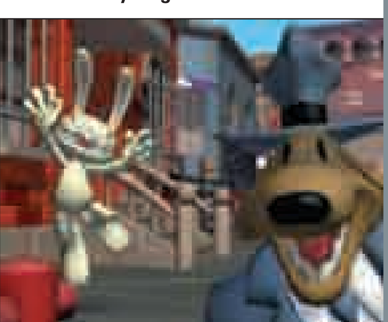
It's been a busy few months for British developer Kuju, with the company expanding its newly founded Brighton studio with an aim to specialise in 'lifestyle' gaming. Rebranded as Kuju Lifestyle, the developer plans to target more mass-market genres such as singing, dancing and party-style efforts, in an effort to emulate the trend started by Sony's *EyeToy* and *SingStar* games. Elsewhere, Kuju's Surrey studio is busy working on a game tied to George A Romero (cult zombie-flick director), due for release through Hip Games next year.





MAXXED OUT

Those of you hoping for the return of everyone's favourite freelance police, Sam and Max, following their cancellation by LucasArts last year can stop holding your breath – it looks like you're out of luck. Despite German developer Bad Brain Entertainment hinting that it was working with LucasArts to resurrect the canned title, things have come to a close. "Negotiations with LucasArts failed," said the developer. "We won't get *Sam & Max 2* – not the code, the artwork or anything else."

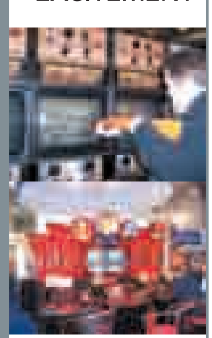




ATEI ONCE AGAIN FAILS TO GENERATE INDUSTRY EXCITEMENT

JUST A LOT OF NOTHING?





Yes, yes, that's an Elvis game. Happy now?



Sega had the best showing with plenty of varied titles.

Barely a month into the new year and already people from all corners of the games industry had a trade show to attend. January saw the annual Amusement Trades Exhibition International (ATEI) at Earl's Court, where men in suits played colourful games that didn't suit them and manufacturers of obscure peripherals sat around trying to entice people into their booths with free sweets, badges and keyrings.

Disappointingly, despite all the crazy colour, noise and booth-babe fodder, there wasn't anything worth going crazy over. In fact, many exhibits only reinforced popular ideas about the industry dying under the weight of mass-market gimmicks.

The busiest and most impressive stand was Sega's. The company showed pretty much every title on its current line-up, including the diminutive *Mushiking: The King Of The Beetle*. Aimed at *Pokémon*-loving 5-12 year olds, *Mushiking* is a card-based battling game featuring different types of beetle and 36 cards to collect, with more on the horizon to keep them coming back. This is the next big craze, we're told, although it's really not for adults – the machine is smaller than conventional cabinets and as such any grown-up will look foolish playing it.

Other Sega showings were the new version of *Outrun 2* – *Outrun 2 SP* – boasting more cars and an extra 15 courses; *Ghost Squad*, an IC card-enabled counter-terrorist shooter; and *Virtua Striker 4*, again making use of collectable IC cards to offer extra content and keep people coming back. Sega's extravagant Cycraft simulator was also in attendance, this time showcasing its talents via *Initial D Version 3*.

Sega and Namco were both showing off offerings in the SWP (skill with prize) sector, clearly aiming to drum up some business with pub distributors and push plans to penetrate the lucrative pub market and take over from quiz machines. While Sega again demonstrated its latest version of *Shoot-Out Pool*, Namco had its *Aim For Cash* range in attendance. Based on the *Point Blank* series, these would be a great addition to any pub; and even though these machines are clearly programmed to only pay out a percentage of what's put in, they're still quite fun.

"**NOT MUCH** AT THE SHOW STOOD OUT – IT WAS ALL **GENERIC LIGHTGUN** AND RACING GAMES – **NOTHING EXCITING**"



The only other game of genuine interest was Konami's *Akuma*, although perhaps more for the technology it uses than its actual gameplay. The game uses two screens to create a spooky holographic effect, which generates the game's desired ghostly feel. A few inches in front of a standard monitor is a transparent screen that projects images of moving sprites, giving the impression that characters are coming out of the screen. The shooting itself is a bit vague – it's hard to see when you've hit anything and you're encouraged to allow your gun to charge up, but this is awkward given all the activity in front of you. Still, it's an interesting idea and we're keen to see more of this.

Nothing else at the show stood out. It was all generic lightgun and racing games – nothing exciting or daring, just typical safe, rehashes of things seen a million times before. Racing games were notably shallow – just about every company had a *Need For Speed Underground* clone of some kind, *The Fast And The Furious* being the main example. By copying the *Need For Speed* formula and style and coupling it with the *…Furious* licence, this will undoubtedly be one of the most successful machines this year as far as pulling power is concerned.

It's a sad time when such a generic title is the only game arcade owners will care about.



Do you really want to go to arcades to play Monopoly? No? Oh…

PUNCH OUT

Catering for all walks of the amusements way of life, ATEI was not just home to a disappointing collection of arcade games. Also in attendance were swathes of other chillingly crude devices, further demonstrating the lack of imagination present in the amusement industry. Exemplifying this is the *Boxer* range of fist-fuelled, macho 'strength testers'. These were out in force at ATEI and are apparently instrumental in attracting packs of dim-witted males into arcades, ensuring actual gamers will want to stay outside due to a fear of getting caught up in the confused aggression of brutish men trying to look hard in front of their girlfriends. Things really aren't looking good for arcades right now.



NOT ANOTHER…

XBOX 2 STORY

HOPEFUL GAMERS LOOK TO E3 FOR ANNOUNCEMENT

Despite being bitterly disappointed by the lack of an expected Xbox 2 announcement at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) last month, we're once again facing yet another next-gen no-show as Microsoft has confirmed its Xbox 2 (speculatively named Xenon) will not make an appearance at the Game Developers' Conference next month as previously expected. Despite the GDC being the platform for debuting the original Xbox some five years ago, the likelihood of a GDC showing this time around was looking unlikely when it was revealed that Microsoft's J Allard would be making a keynote presentation at the event. Obviously, any Xbox 2 announcement would be made by Bill Gates himself.

So with the GDC no longer the venue for Xbox 2, all eyes turn towards E3. Indeed, earlier this month, before Microsoft made its announcement, American Technology Research analyst PJ McNealy mentioned the firm was more likely to use E3 to unveil the machine, citing a conversation with senior management as his source.

This means this year's E3 is destined to be one of the busiest and most exciting in years, far overshadowing last year's PSP and DS showdown. Not only is the Xbox 2 a certainty (Microsoft can't miss this slot, not with the hardware due for a release in the US around November), but Nintendo and Sony are also expected to unveil some form of next-gen hardware at the show, with rumours (that are alleged to have come from inside Sony) suggesting the company plans to show actual running code on the PlayStation3.

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



GO GO GADGET TV

Stand aside, bid-up.tv – a new digital retail channel backed by game cheat specialist Datel has been created to sate the needs of the games-buying public. Launched last month, Max TV features items from home computers and LCD televisions to remote-control cars and mini-motorbikes, along with many of Datel's own products. Those of you with an interest in such items and access to digital TV can see it on channel 669, wedged between the Sky Travel Shop and the not-so-glamorous Factory Outlet TV, or you can visit www.max.tv and buy online.





SILVERADO

With Sony finally supplying retailers with regular stock of its slimline PStwo, the publisher has quashed rumours that it's introducing a silver model of the machine in the near future. Speculation spread after catalogue retailer Argos placed a listing on its online store for the silver PStwo along with an image of the machine, both of which disappeared after Sony stepped in. The publisher has yet to deny that it has any plans for a silver PStwo, stating only that it hasn't made any 'official announcements', but given its history of coloured PS2s, such a launch can't be ruled out.





ANYTHING YOU CAN DO...

THRIVING PSP TO RECEIVE UPDATES IN SPITE OF RETURNS

It's been a busy few months for Sony's fledgling handheld. Amid complaints about the unit, PSPs continue to fly off the shelves in Japan and it looks as though the unit's functionality should be receiving the expected media blitz in the not-so-distant future. The music download service, targeting the same audience as Apple's killer iPod/iTunes combo, is expected to be unveiled in the summer with talk of a similar scheme for movies following suit. If your PSP still works by then, that is.

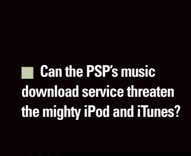
Figures taken from Japanese magazine *Nikkei Business* suggest that around 5,000 units (0.6 per cent of the 800,000 shipped) have been returned to Sony over problems with the Square button, but SCE president Ken Kutaragi insists that a slight lack of responsiveness isn't a fault. "This is something that we've created, and this is our specification," he told the Japanese publication. The 'problem' arises from the fact that with the Square button so close to the screen, the switch beneath it has to sit off to the right, causing it to be slightly unresponsive at times and, in some cases, to stick. "There may be people that complain about its usability, but that's something that users and game software developers will have to adapt to," Kutaragi insisted. So that's that, then…

Meanwhile, despite failing to convince the world with its MiniDisc format, Sony plans to make UMD an open standard, allowing third parties to create peripherals and players for the new format.

"Games will be limited to the PSP, but movies and music should be for everyone," Kutaragi told conference-goers in Japan, opening doors for other firms to help build the PSP's propriety format into a popular mainstay. But this in itself raises more questions. Music would be fine but video is another matter entirely – would UMD movies optimised for the PSP be able to maintain image quality on larger screens, for instance? All will become clear in due course, we're sure.

In the meantime, Sony is stepping up production of the PSP in preparation for the handheld's US and European launches, with the machine set to appear on 24 March in the States. Monthly output is said to be rising to a million units a month by April and increasing steadily from there – sources suggest likely predictions of 2 million units a month by late summer and 3 million a month by the end of the year.

This comes on the back of Kutaragi's admission that the handheld has been in short supply so far. "Demand is so strong that we already do not have enough supply," he explained. "[800,000 units] is not a small volume, but it's not good enough to satisfy the market either." Don't worry, Ken – we're plenty satisfied…



■ New capabilities are set to be unveiled over the summer, boosting the PSP.



■ Can the PSP's music download service threaten the mighty iPod and iTunes?

> "THERE MAY BE PEOPLE THAT **COMPLAIN ABOUT ITS USABILITY,** BUT THAT'S SOMETHING THAT USERS AND GAME SOFTWARE **DEVELOPERS WILL HAVE TO ADAPT TO**"
> KEN KUTARAGI, SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT



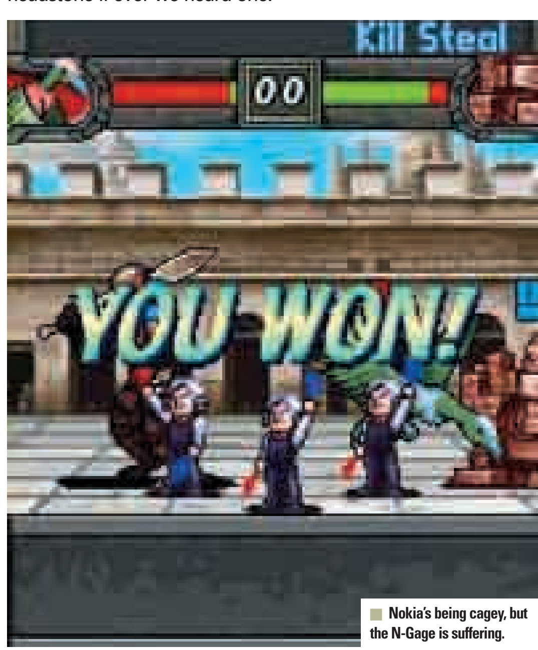
N-GAGE SALES REVEALED AMID DEATH KNELL RUMOURS

THE NOK-IA ON EFFECT

Nokia has been defending itself to the hilt recently, following reports from an online technology website that the Finnish mobile company was in the process of closing down the German research, development and production facility for its N-Gage handheld.

The report came at the end of troubling month for the firm, no doubt adding fuel to rumours that the N-Gage is finished. Initial concerns were raised when UK market research company ChartTrack (responsible for virtually all of the UK games industry's sales data) announced it was to cease publishing an N-Gage software sales chart due to "lack of interest". Shortly after the announcement, Nokia's own quarterly financial data – covering October to December 2004 – made for interesting reading when it reported that the manufacturer had "cumulatively sold 1.3 million N-Gage devices"; a figure that, given a lack of regional distinction, must be taken as worldwide sales, which means it falls well short of Nokia's plans to sell between 6 million and 9 million units by the end of 2004.

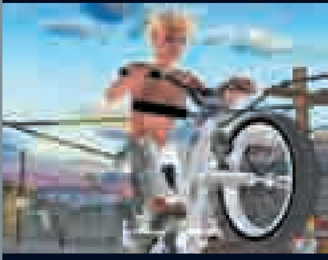
Not surprisingly, though, the company remained adamant that the handheld isn't going anywhere. "Nokia has no intention of shutting down the N-Gage," said a Nokia spokesperson. "We are completely committed to the platform and we're looking at the strongest line-up of games yet. There's been so much money and effort poured into the system, we're not going to pull out now." Now there's a quote for the headstone if ever we heard one.



Nokia's being cagey, but the N-Gage is suffering.

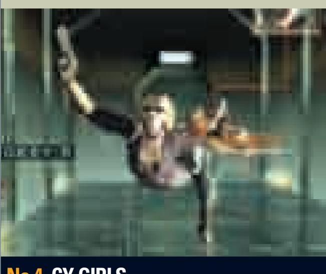
games™ THE TOP FIVE

NUDGE NUDGE, WINK WINK



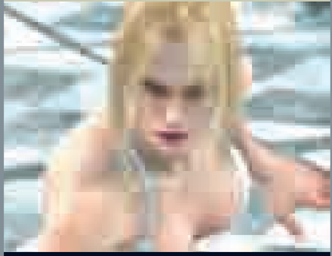
No.5 BMX XXX

Bikes in every sense



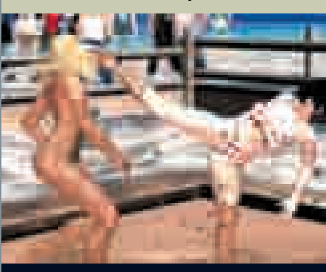
No.4 CY GIRLS

'Sexy crime fighting' indeed



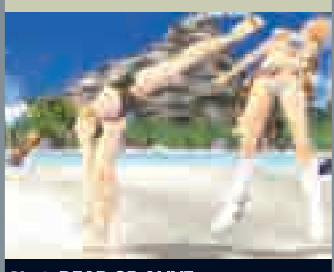
No.3 DEATH BY DEGREES

Oh, Nina, what have you done?



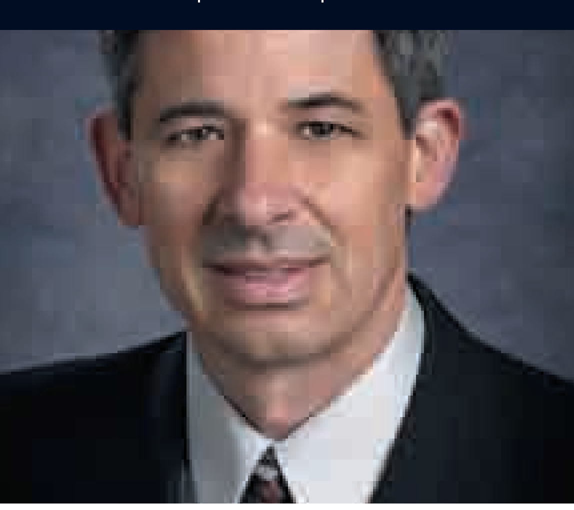
No.2 RUMBLE ROSES

Kick, punch, it's all in the chest



No.1 DEAD OR ALIVE

So that's what 'bounce' means…



NVIDIA TO MAKE MOST OF PS3 GRAPHICS CHIP

WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

Recent comments from Nvidia's head of corporate marketing have suggested that aside from being solely dedicated to Sony's upcoming PlayStation3, the custom graphics chip being developed for the system by Nvidia will be used to drive the next generation of PC graphics cards.

Speaking to technology website X-Bit Labs about Nvidia's role in the creation of the PS3's graphic processor, David Roman indicated that the manufacturer already had other products in the pipeline that would use the same technology as Sony's console.

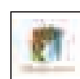
"The timing and everything is up to them to disclose, although we will have some products a little bit later this year, so this is not that far in the future on the development side," he said. "After the GeForce 6 series, this is the next-generation GPU. It will support DirectX 9, Shader Models 3… It will be the most feature-rich, the most powerful GPU that we've ever created."

That the chip will make an appearance in Nvidia's own products is no great shock, although the fact that it is so easily adaptable to such a job is rather surprising – especially considering comments from Nvidia CEO Jen-Hsun Huang last month that the PlayStation3's GPU "doesn't use any of the Windows features… it's not about the PC at all".

As well as the PS3, Nvidia may work on other Sony products. "We are looking at other Sony devices that will have the cell processors," Roman said.

Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



RUMBLE IN THE COURTS

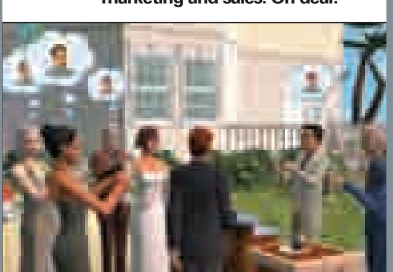
In a new twist to the continuing legal dispute brought on by US technology firm Immersion Corp, Sony has been ordered to pay the company for the use of force feedback 'rumble' technology across the PlayStation brand. The ruling, which means Sony must pay a 1.37 per cent fee based on sales of the PlayStation, comes on top of Immersion's success last year that saw a jury award it damages of $82 million after it found Sony guilty of infringing copyrights held by Immersion by means of the Dual Shock controller and over 40 games.



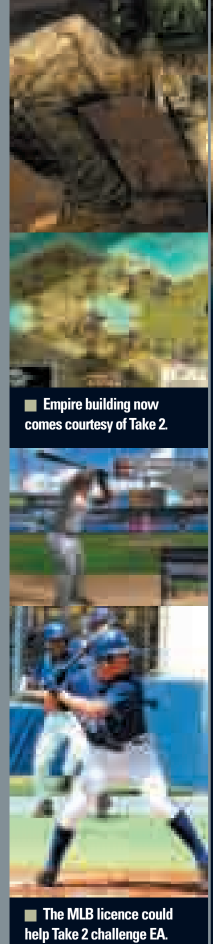


'THIS IS SIM BROTHER'

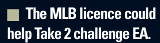
As if reality television couldn't get any worse, Electronic Arts has thrown its licensed hat into the ring and revealed plans to create an interactive TV show based on its hit simulation series *The Sims*. Reports say the publisher has already approached a number of TV production firms, although the level of interest is unclear. "One idea could be that you're controlling a family, telling them when to go to the kitchen and when to go to the bedroom, and with this mechanism you have gamers all over the world 'playing the show'," said Jan Bolz, EA Europe's VP of marketing and sales. Oh dear.







Empire building now comes courtesy of Take 2.



The MLB licence could help Take 2 challenge EA.

WHY 2K?

TAKE 2 LAUNCHES NEW LABEL, SIGNS UP BIG NAMES

Publisher Take 2 has established a new label under which many of its products will be released. 2K Games will be the new home for Visual Concepts, recently purchased from Sega, while the firm's internal sports titles will be put out under the 2K Sports umbrella in the absence of the ESPN licence. The 2K brand will be home to the likes of PopTop Software, Venom Games and Indie Built (recently acquired from Microsoft) as well as being used to release high-profile titles in association with bigger external developers.

The first of these to jump on board is Firaxis Games, leaving the safety of Atari's port after the mighty *Sid Meier's Pirates!* in a long-term, multi-title deal. The first of its games 2K will release is set to be *Civilization IV*, a real coup for the new label and a game guaranteed to bring the pennies rolling in. "The *Civilization* name brings with it an expectation of quality from millions of fans around the world," said 2K's VP of publishing, Susan Lewis. "It is a pleasure to be working with a company like Firaxis that has developers who have proven with every title that they are masters of this genre."

But Take 2's bid for global domination hasn't stopped there. In a bid to play EA at its own game, the publisher has also finalised deals with every key Major League Baseball licensing firm. This follows an initial deal with the MLB Players' Association (which EA's VP of corporate communications Jeff Brown described as costing "stupid money" – "They are paying an exclusive price for a non-exclusive agreement," he explained) but these further agreements close several loopholes in the original deal. While first-party developers will still be able to have access to official team licences and such, third parties like EA – whose *MVP Baseball* titles sold 1.3 million copies last year, representing 61 per cent of the baseball market – have now been effectively forced out of the market altogether.

While it may not be much – this small slice of the market was only worth $93 million in the US compared to EA's $309 million NFL exclusive – Take 2's defiance in the face of the EA money machine is a welcome sight. Though whether or not this kind of deal, which could see as many as two MLB titles released a year, is good for the consumer remains to be seen.

> "THE CIVILIZATION NAME BRINGS WITH IT **AN EXPECTATION OF QUALITY** FROM MILLIONS OF FANS AROUND THE WORLD"

WHO'S BUYING THE BUYERS?

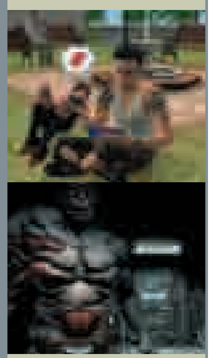
MURDOCH MOVING IN FOR GAMES ACQUISITION

As videogames become a business big enough to rival the film and music industries, it was only a matter of time before the world's media moguls pricked up their ears. This time, it's the turn of Rupert Murdoch (or more specifically, his company, News Corporation) to express an interest in buying up some gaming property, with confirmation of a potential investment being presented at a recent US investment conference.

"We see videogames as a big business and would like to get into it," said Peter Chernin, COO of News Corporation, revealing that the owner of the Sky and US Fox TV networks was "kicking the tyres of pretty much all the videogames companies".

"Right now, we are struggling with the gap between Electronic Arts, which comes with a high price tag, and the next tier of companies," he said. "These may be too focused on one or two product lines, however."

Murdoch is the second major media player to be linked with the games industry, with Viacom chairman Sumner Redstone buying a large stake of US publisher Midway last year. Although speculation that Redstone will buy the publisher outright is strong, the company has yet to announce any further plans regarding investment.



Media mogul Murdoch is looking to get into gaming.



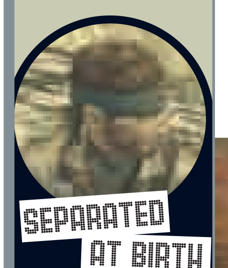
JUST LIKE YOU AND ME…

RESEARCH PROVES GAMERS AREN'T FREAKS

New research has revealed – fairly unsurprisingly – that adults who play videogames aren't fat, lazy layabouts after all. "Those who continue to portray the game population as single-minded loafers are living in their own fantasy world," said Doug Lowenstein, president of the Entertainment Software Association, the organisation that commissioned the research.

The study, conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, indicates that many adult gamers enjoy exercise, playing sports, reading and "engaging in religious, creative and cultural activities" as much as they do videogames, with even avid gamers (those who play games for more than 11 hours a week) spending over 30 hours a week on such pastimes. Reading rated most highly on the agenda, with 93 per cent of the 802 adults questioned admitting to enjoying a good book, with sporting pastimes next in line (79 per cent), then cultural events such as concerts, museums and the theatre (62 per cent), closely followed by religious activities (61 per cent).

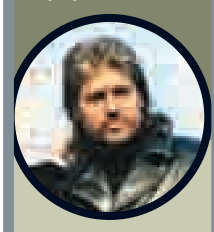
"Gamers are everywhere and they're everyone," insisted Lowenstein. "They are your friends, neighbours, co-workers, relatives and kids – they lead responsible and caring lives, balancing their enjoyment of interactive entertainment with many other activities important to a well-rounded lifestyle." Well, that's a weight off our minds, then.



SEPARATED AT BIRTH

games™ tracks down those videogame lookalikes

There! In the shadows! You might think it's Solid Snake, but listen closely – those decidedly country guitar twangs prove it's none other than Billy Ray Cyrus.



GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



NO. 29: DEMONSTRATION, THAT'S WHAT YOU NEED

It's a ploy that we've seen countless times, but one that never ceases to amaze us in terms of its cheap ability to send a game's popularity rocketing – bundling a playable demo of an anticipated title with one that usually isn't worth buying. Konami is one of the biggest culprits, although to be fair, at least the games that it uses as 'bundle buddies' are usually pretty good in their own right; *Zone Of The Enders 2* (an enjoyable if rather repetitive robot blaster) came with a demo of *Metal Gear Solid 2*, while the original *Metal Gear Solid* had *Silent Hill* tucked away inside the packaging.

Now, however, it's just getting tactical and, not surprisingly, it's Sony that's pulling the strings. The ploy? Turn the diabolically bad *Death By Degrees* – a game which, having endured more than half of it, we can assure you is so bad we're amazed Namco put its name to it – into a success by sweetening the deal with a demo of *Tekken 5*. Cynical? You'd better believe it.

Then again, if *Death By Degrees* doesn't enter the top ten because of it, we might finally start having some faith in the world again.



ZOE2 proved popular, though we're sure it had something to do with the free *MGS2* demo.

Death By Degrees – a truly broken game. We're begging you, don't be fooled by the demo.

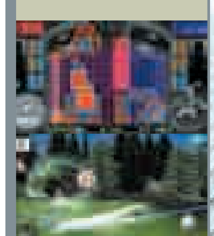
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING

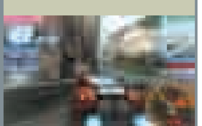


HALF-LIFE, WHOLE SALE

Continual delays and bitter spats between publisher and developer aside, it appears that the release of *Half-Life 2* has gone well for Vivendi, with the publisher reporting sales of nearly 1.7 million copies of the game worldwide in the first two weeks alone. It's a significant number, especially since it only takes into account retail sales and not online purchases through Valve's Steam network. Given the download system's success, the overall number of games sold is expected to be considerably higher. As a worldwide figure, it still doesn't come close to the numbers clocked up by recent successes like *Halo 2* and *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* (the latter of which sold 1.5 million units across Europe in its first week in the shops) but no doubt Vivendi will claim it's won a victory all the same.



PSP GETS A US RELEASE DATE



Ridge Racers has been confirmed for the launch.



MARCH TO VICTORY

Sony has announced that the PSP will hit the US on 24 March. Speculation is high that, given the announcement of the same release date for launch titles like *Darkstalkers* and *Dynasty Warriors* over here, Europe will enjoy a simultaneous release of the handheld despite rumours of delays.

The US Value Pack will cost $249.99 (around £133, though a price of £180-200 has been suggested) and as well as all the extras bundled in the Japanese pack (headphones, case, strap and a 32Mb Memory Stick Pro Duo), the first million shipped will come with a UMD copy of *Spider-Man 2*.

First-party software will cost upwards of $39.99 and the launch line-up looks pretty strong. Most of the Japanese highlights such as *Metal Gear Ac!d*, *Ridge Racers* and *Lumines* are joined by the likes of *Untold Legends*, *WipEout Pure* and *Ape Escape: On The Loose* in a 24-game-strong line-up due for release in the PSP's 'launch window'.

"The high-profile line-up includes a wide range of products that will appeal to every type of gamer, providing consumers with the ultimate entertainment experience in the palm of their hands," said Andrew House, executive VP of SCEA.

A PIRATE'S LIFE FOR ME

TRADING STANDARDS SWOOP ENDS IN SIX ARRESTS

A massive £800,000 of fake computer games formed the majority of a £1 million haul of counterfeit goods confiscated by authorities last month. Six arrests were made when officials from industry body Elspa arrived to investigate at the Aintree Computer Fair on Merseyside.

Working with Mersey Police, FACT (Federation Against Copyright Theft) and Sefton Trading Standards, Elspa not only prevented the illegal sale of a huge number of pirated games but also put an end to the mod-chipping operations of two individuals.

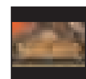
"Elspa would like to thank Sefton Trading Standards and Mersey Police for their sterling efforts in this operation," said Roger Bennett, director general of Elspa. "Computer and videogame piracy causes a massive financial loss to the industry, so it is rewarding to see such a large amount of illegal product removed from the marketplace."

This amount of illegal games seized is the largest ever haul for Sefton, with Andrew Naisbitt, manager of Sefton Trading Standards, confirming the raid at Aintree was "the biggest ever haul of fake goods in the borough." "Sefton takes piracy very seriously and will not hesitate to take court action against those responsible," Naisbitt added.



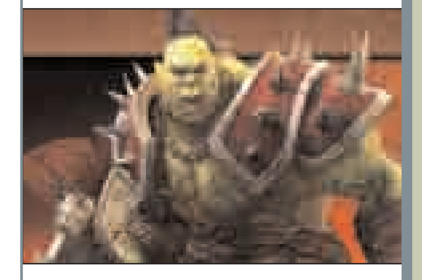
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BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



ONE WORLD, NO VISION

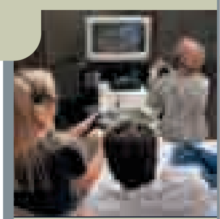
Concerns over the European performance of Blizzard's *World Of Warcraft* were accentuated recently, when it emerged that the game's huge US success had led to massive downtime for several of Blizzard's servers. With over 200,000 people playing at once, more than a quarter of *WOW*'s North American servers were out of action, leaving many users having to 'queue' for a playing slot. Although counter-measures have been put into place, with the European launch only a few weeks away, suspicions are already brewing that we'll see the same problems over here.





TEKKEN TO THE CLEANERS

With the tenth anniversary of the *Tekken* franchise looming, Namco may have something special up its sleeve for the Japanese release of *Tekken 5* at the end of March. According to retail sources, the publisher is looking to include the original *Tekken* as a bonus, accessed through an archive on the disc. What's more, *Tekken 2* and *Tekken 3* may also be included, although this is likely to be speculation on top of the more likely original report. Namco has yet to confirm anything, but we've got our fingers crossed.



Long-distance gaming is getting more popular.





UPTAKE SET TO ROCKET IN 2005

BROADBAND ON THE RUN

Can technologically inept Britain finally catch up with its European counterparts? A resounding 'yes' is the current feeling from experts in the world of broadband, with 2005 due to see record numbers of people signing up to the service.

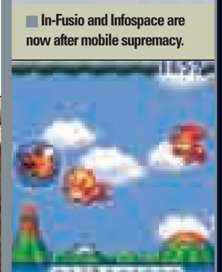
According to figures released last month, over 5 million people had broadband at home by August 2004 for internet use and gaming (no distinction is made between the two) and predictions say this number could rise to over 8 million by the end of 2005; that's around 30 per cent of UK households.

This increase has been tied to the recent drop in prices, with a basic 512k connection costing as little as £20 a month (although one service provider has offered 1Mb lines for just £18.99). Another suggested reason for the uptake is BT's 70 per cent reduction in costs to service providers using BT exchanges, opening up the field for increased competition and service quality.

Sadly, the UK is still some way behind some European countries – France and the Netherlands, for example, have a larger uptake and offer services of up to 15Mb for a minimum cost – but, hopefully, it's only a matter of time before high prices for unreliable connections go the same way as the 56k modem.



In-Fusio and Infospace are now after mobile supremacy.



MORE BUYING FOR MOBILE GAME GIANT

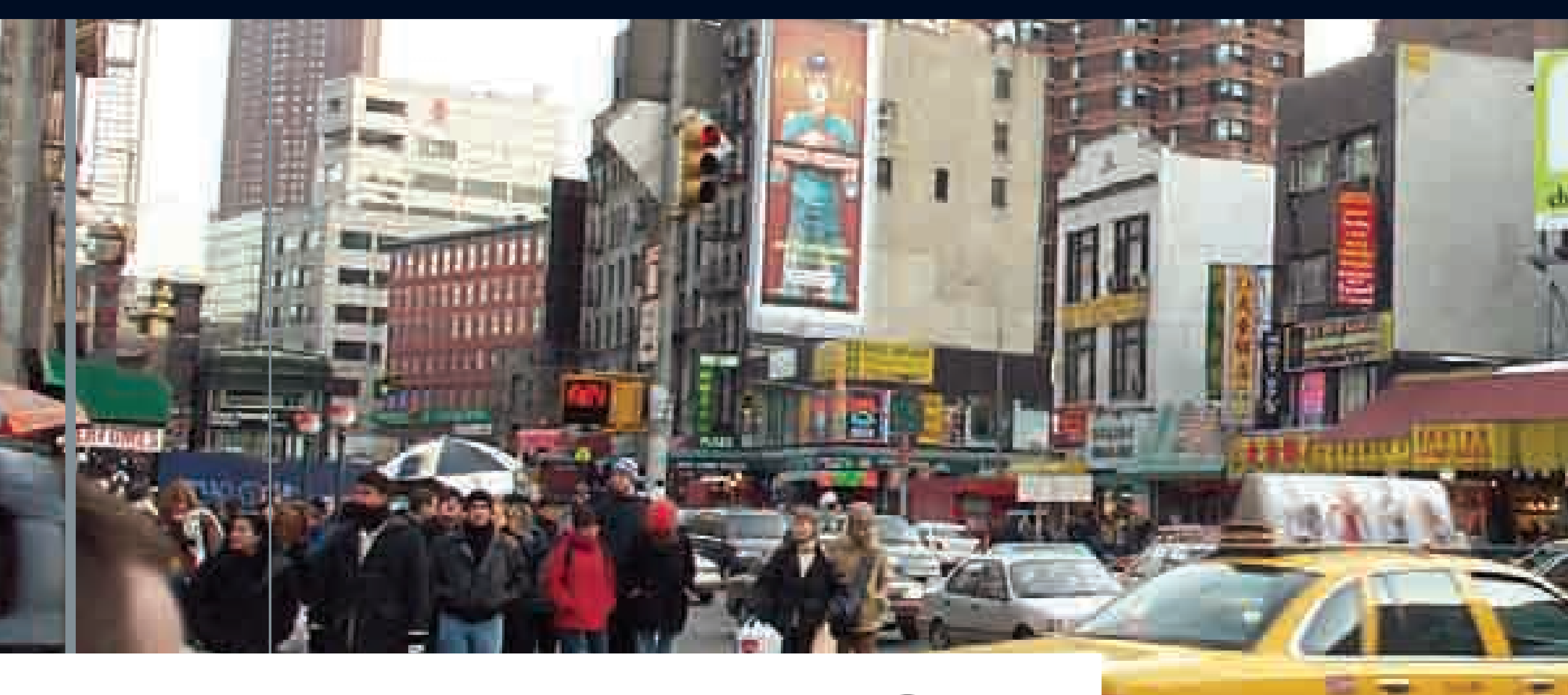
FUSION FRENZY

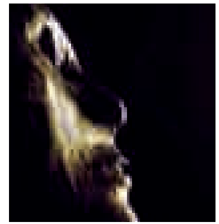
Mobile game publisher In-Fusio has been on yet another buying frenzy after acquiring two mobile development and publishing companies in the space of a week.

Although no financial details have been released, the US giant's purchase of Thumbworks (based in the US) and Mobile Scope (a developer located in Germany) expands its portfolio of games and software applications even further with titles such as *Die Hard* and *Ice Age* (although these are hardly the biggest of brands in terms of videogames) and increases the number of In-Fusio employees to 230.

"After the purchase of Thumbworks, the acquisition of Mobile Scope matches our strategy to deliver entertaining content for mobile phones and services dedicated to players' communities," said Giles Corbett, In-Fusio co-CEO. "In-Fusio has become one of the world's top three mobile game publishers and these assets will play a key role in our development."

With numerous acquisitions in the mobile game industry over the last six months, In-Fusio and rival Infospace are vying for the top spot. We just hope it doesn't go so far that they're the only two companies left…





LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE



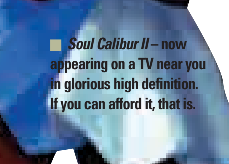
"HIGH DEFINITION TV ISN'T JUST SOME COOL TECHNOLOGY A FEW TELEVISIONS; IT'S THE NEW STANDARD, AGREED UPON BY

My head is reeling with numbers. Dot pitch, resolution, DTV sub-channels, return rates, height, width, depth, weight, refresh rate, overscan, service codes, geometry, red push, upconversion, pulldown, contrast ratio… and price. The loftily heralded age of HDTV has arrived for the consumer, and all he has to do is memorise a thousand arbitrary parameters, all expressed numerically, in order to make the right decision. On top of that, companies name their models in yet more code – HD62XSP115 – rather than with memorable monikers. They could learn a lot from the car industry; they're able to come up with enough nonsense names to avoid saying "Test drive the new 560XFA-72!" By the time I'd finished comparing offerings I was wishing they'd been called things like, "You remember, that one we quite liked with the shiny black front and grilly bits," and "The silvery-grey one with glowy buttons."

High Definition TV isn't just some cool technology a few companies are putting in their TVs; it's the official new national television standard, invented and agreed upon by all sorts of important people. It replaces the 50-year-old NTSC standard, offering an enormous leap in clarity often referred to as the most significant advance in television since colour. Numerically, the step from 480 lines (today's TV resolution in the US) to 1,080 lines (the top range of HD) doesn't sound much, but consider that this equates to more than 2 million pixels on screen, against the mere 300,000 of conventional TV, and you start to, you know, get the picture.

Now is a good time to embrace the technology, for a number of reasons. Local affiliates are already broadcasting hi-def signals free-to-air. In my area, CBS, ABC, Fox, WB, NBC and PBS are all tossing this stuff out. You can grab a genuine widescreen broadcast in high resolution, with a Dolby Digital soundtrack, out of the air, for free, with an aerial. *Desperate Housewives* has never looked so good (although it does show up Terri Hatcher's eye job). Digital cable offers yet more. Also, no matter which format wins the next-generation DVD war – Blu-ray or HD-DVD – both are set to run in 1,920x1,080, not, coincidentally, the sharpest mode achieveable by HDTV.

I wouldn't bring you all this way without mention of games; happily, the Xbox has a few games that run in various high-def resolutions, the most worthwhile being *Soul Calibur II*. Most others support 480p, a non-interlaced format that, despite not officially considered HDTV, is supported by all HDTV sets (largely because 480p is also the best you can get out of current-



■ *Soul Calibur II* – now appearing on a TV near you in glorious high definition. If you can afford it, that is.



COMPANIES ARE PUTTING IN THEIR ALL SORTS OF IMPORTANT PEOPLE"

generation DVD). Drawing a complete frame every sixtieth of a second, instead of the jaggy interlacing fields we're used to, it makes your games look like they're running on a great big PC monitor. You don't see scan lines or flicker. Some PS2 and Cube games work in 480p as well, but I couldn't find any that ran in true hi-def (720p and above) like Xbox has. Clearly, next generation, all three companies will support true hi-def out of the box.

So I decided to take the plunge, and thus began the maddening comparisons. In the end, shuffling around like Raymond Babbitt, barely able to function in a head heaving with figures, proved unnecessary. All the models looked, to varying degrees, like amazing digital screens with incredible high resolution far exceeding normal TV. But the sole contender in my size/price range, from a Japanese company that's also done quite well in the console market, went beyond perceptible things like resolution and was quite simply a window. When you pressed buttons on the remote, different things happened on the other side of the window. Swooping around a car show. Travelling downstream in a rainforest. College football. Deep, vivid, solid, real. At once the 'most significant advance since colour' thing made startling, incontestable sense and my decision was made. When Sky starts broadcasting HDTV in Britain around, er, 2006, I'm sure you'll see what I mean.

Many thanks



MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Chocolate Gingers



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Well, HDTV



GOT ANY QUESTIONS FOR THE SHAPE? THEN JUST DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net YOU MIGHT GET A REPLY… OR POSSIBLY JUST THE FINGER.

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

BRITISH SUBTITLES

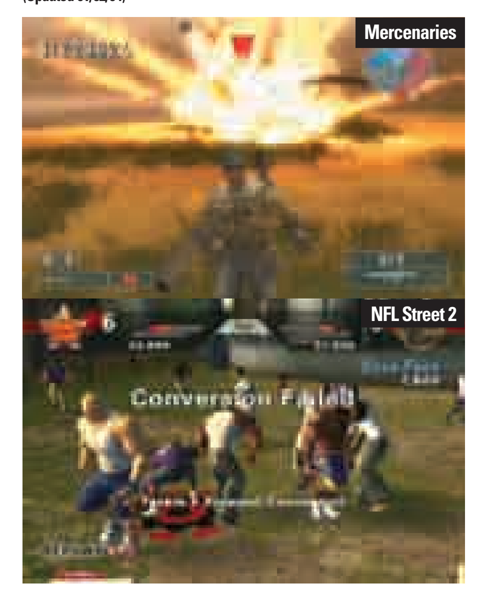


I'll tell you what's becoming really quite offensive. Increasingly, Britons with even remotely regional accents are being subtitled on TV. Someone comes on from Newcastle or something and they stick on these shameful subtitles. We invented your language!

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	PS2
2	Mercenaries	LucasArts	PS2
3	NFL Street 2	EA Sports BIG	PS2
4	Mercenaries	LucasArts	Xbox
5	Knights Of The Old Republic II	LucasArts	Xbox
6	Call Of Duty: Finest Hour	Activision	PS2
7	Halo 2	Microsoft	Xbox
8	The Getaway: Black Monday	SCEA	PS2
9	Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	PS2
10	Knights Of The Old Republic II	LucasArts	Xbox

(Updated 01/02/04)



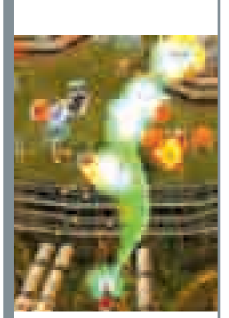
Mercenaries

NFL Street 2

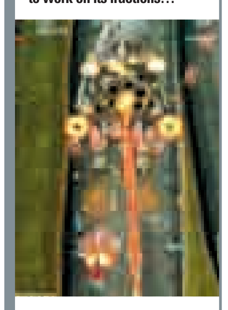
KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"I STILL HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO PLAY RAIDEN 3. BY THE TIME THE THERE'LL NO DOUBT BE SOME NEW GAME I'D RATHER



Raiden – perfection in shooting form, but still needs to work on its fractions…



Did you know there's a *Raiden 3* out in Japanese arcades? Can you believe that? *Raiden 3*! *Raiden Fighters* and *Raiden Fighters 2* were godly in my opinion. *Raiden* and *Raiden 2*, not to mention *Raiden Trad*, were classics. And now there's a *Raiden 3*! It looks beautiful. The graphics are brushed up to beyond *Ikaruga* smoothness. As far as overhead-scrolling shooters go, I'd say it's the best looking one I've met. The system for shooting is sweet as well – occasionally, when you kill an enemy, he leaves behind a little glowing orb. The orb changes colour – red, green or blue – and never vanishes from the screen. You have to pick it up sooner or later, or else just keep avoiding it. Pick it up when it's red and you earn the standard Vulcan Cannon; green gets you the Laser; blue gets you the Proton Laser. Keep getting orbs of the same colour to level up your gun so that it reaches insane, unbeatable, screen-spanning proportions.

You shoot an enemy. He leaves behind an orb. You pick it up when it is…

Green. I tried to take a picture of the game cabinet. I had my digital camera in my coat pocket and I popped it out to try to take a picture of the bullet barrage hell. Before my Sony CyberShot's too-slow lens housing could fully expand, an employee of the Taito Hirose Entertainment Yard (HEY) had hooked his arm around my elbow.

"IT NO CAN TAKE THE PICTURE!"

I later visited Taito's website, to find no pictures of the game. So I can't prove to you that it exists. You'll have to trust me.

Blue. A girl in a black maid outfit stood back, watching a man play *Raiden 3*. The lines were longer than lines might be at any arcade you've seen in the last decade. This is not to say *Raiden 3* is the most popular game ever – just that in Japan, people sometimes enter arcades on their way home from work and end up entranced by flashing bullets on a new shooter. HEY's *Ikaruga* machine, perhaps the most-played in Japan, has caused me to be late for an appointment at Akihabara Station two times in the last five years. It was clear that the nice-looking girl was watching the current *Raiden 3* player with careful attention. The guy was wearing a leather jacket and sunglasses. He seemed like either a *King Of Fighters* character or a guy cool enough to have a maid-cosplayer for a girlfriend. Yet when he finally died at the last boss and stood up, disgusted, the girl turned and walked away. He went down the stairs; she went toward the up escalator. I later saw her watching a match of *Guilty Gear Isuka*.

Red. I explained to a Japanese, game-designing friend why I liked *Raiden 3*'s approach to shooting. This was a phone conversation. He didn't get it. "I don't get it," he said. "You keep picking up red orbs and it powers up the Vulcan Cannon?" Yeah, I said. "And the Vulcan Cannon is the standard weapon?" Yeah.



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON TWENTY NINE	MASTERING INNUENDO
HAROOO. Geemu wo miru no ga suki desu ka?	HELLOOO. Do you like watching people play games?!
Anou. Tabun.	Uh. Maybe.
Zutto zutto mae kara miteta yo. Kimi no souiufuuni hoka no dareka no yaru koto wo miteta sugata wo.	I was watching you for a long, long time. As you watched others playing (games) like that.
Sonna ni miru hito wa, yaru ki ga nai ka? tte omotteta.	I thought, do those who watch others in such a way not have the desire to play themselves?
Anou… E?	Uh… huh?

MACHINE ISN'T CROWDED BE PLAYING INSTEAD"

"Picking up five red orbs, you say, makes the Vulcan Cannon roughly the width of the screen?" Um, yes. "How wide does the Vulcan Cannon start out?" Uh – it's about the width of the ship. "How many bullets is it made up of?" I thought so hard I squinted. "Three?" My friend sighed. "Things like this, and double-jumps in 3D platformers – they're signs that Japanese game developers still haven't learned." I stuttered something. It didn't amount to anything. "Reduce the fractions!" my friend yelled. "Japanese game designers need to reduce their fractions!" He hung up shortly after.

I still haven't been able to play *Raiden 3*. By the time HEY's machine is no longer crowded there'll no doubt be some new game I'd rather play, even though it'll be so crowded I'll only end up watching it anyway.

Kind regards



CHEAP ENTERTAINMNET

Taito's Hirose Entertainment Yard, or HEY, is my favourite arcade in the world. If you want to go there, it's simple. If you're ever in Akihabara, exit the 'Electric City Exit' and turn right. There'll be a big street called Chuo-Doori, you can't miss it. On Sundays, they close the street at Showa-Doori to the south and Kuramaebashi-Doori to the north, so people can walk around the wide avenue like something out of a medieval marketplace. Anyway, you'll want to cross Chuo-Doori. You should see a huge red 'Club Sega' arcade on your left. Pass it by – it's got no soul, just lots of cigarette smoke. One block north of Club Sega, you'll see a building with a well-advertised hentai shop in the basement. There's also a small sign saying 'HEY' above your head. Take the escalator up and there you are, on the shooters floor, where any retro shooter you've ever read about is alive and well, and probably being played. Playing is ¥100, watching is free. Floor three is beat-'em-ups. The most watchable *Street Fighter III* matches I've ever seen occur here. And if you've wanted to play *Samurai Shodown 64* and were too ashamed to admit it, no-one will notice if you drop a ¥100 credit in it up here. Also, in the far corner, a tricked-out Neo-Geo cabinet with every *Metal Slug*, set on ¥10 a life. Now that's good value.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Monster Hunter G	Capcom	PS2
2	Fu-un Bakumatsu-den	Genki	PS2
3	Gran Turismo 4	SCEJ	PS2
4	Sawaru! Made In Wario	Nintendo	DS
5	Mario Party Advance	Nintendo	GBA
6	Magister Negi Magi	Konami	PS2
7	Super Mario 64 DS	Nintendo	DS
8	Minna no Golf Portable	SCEJ	PSP
9	Dynasty Warriors	Koei	PSP
10	Neon Genesis Evangelion: IM2	Broccoli	PS2

(Week ending 23/01/05 © 2005 Media Create Co. Ltd. All Rights Reserved)



Monster Hunter G

Mario Party Advance


NINTENDO DS

"MALE OR FEMALE, YOUNG OR OLD, HARDCORE OR HARDLY A GAMER – THE DS IS FOR YOU"
JIM MERRICK

VISIBLE TOUCH

NINTENDO TELLS EUROPEAN GAMERS WHAT THEY WANT TO HEAR

For as long as we can remember, Nintendo's approach to promoting its hardware and software has been a little on the conservative side. While Sony has celebrated each milestone, event or launch with a glamorous party, Nintendo has, until recently, remained stoically opposed to razzmatazz, feeling that its hardware and games should do the talking.

However, times are changing, and while Nintendo remains at the forefront of games design, its share of the home console market has been chipped away, first by Sony and, more recently, by Microsoft's bullish marketing. From being the dominant force in home console gaming in the Eighties and early Nineties, Nintendo has found itself in a position where it only dominates the handheld market – high ground it has maintained since the launch of the Game & Watch series in 1980 and consolidated with the Game Boy brand. In spite of the numerous challengers Nintendo has seen off over the years, it is arguable that none have really managed a credible assault against the Japanese developer – only Nintendo has managed to get the balance of battery life, portability and game quality just right, but that could be about to change with a very real challenge from Sony and its PSP.

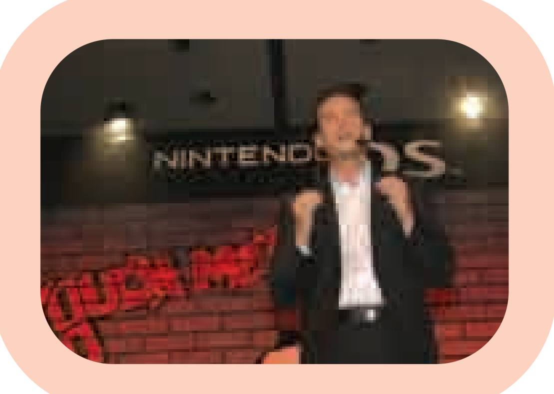
Cometh the hour, cometh the man, and with Reggie Fils-Aime's now infamous battle cry delighting Nintendo's legions of fans at last year's E3, it's evident that the company is making good on its chief marketing manager's promise to kick ass and take names. Gone are the days when Nintendo simply assumes that it will dictate the future of gaming, and while it remains adamant that Sony poses no real threat to the handheld market, a much-needed shift in the company's philosophy was more than a little apparent at Nintendo's second DS event. The first marked the US launch of the DS (something that in itself was a change from the Eurocentric attitude of Nintendo of old). The second, held on 27 January, was of a scale that only one of the biggest and most important publishers could even dream of undertaking.

Nintendo whisked its guests to the heart of Paris in specially branded Nintendo DS Eurostar carriages, clearly keen to make a good impression. The developer had invited some 800 people to the launch – a heady mixture of press, PR and retailers from all over Europe, all eager to hear what Nintendo had to say. Jim Merrick, senior marketing director of Nintendo Europe, began the proceedings with all the gusto of his rivals. "It has taken America by storm, it has taken Japan by storm, and get ready because we're next…" If this was intended to create a stir in the audience, then Merrick will have been disappointed. Unfazed, he continued. "As we have all seen and heard, players overseas have already made the Nintendo DS an overwhelming hit. This, despite the best efforts of another competitor to break the stranglehold Nintendo has on handheld gaming." His speech was littered with the kind of gags that would have had American audiences whooping and hollering, but his digs at "Sony's great wide hope" and the importance of the clamshell configuration fell on deaf ears as the more restrained



> "UNLESS WE CAN INCREASE THE TOTAL VIDEOGAMING POPULATION THERE IS NO BRIGHT FUTURE FOR THIS INDUSTRY"
> SATORU IWATA







European audience was simply waiting to hear the all-important facts regarding the launch of the DS, rather than a series of slights at the expense of a rival developer.

After Merrick's evangelising, it was the turn of notable developers such as Yuji Naka, Hideo Yoshizawa, Yu Suzuki and Will Wright to unanimously conclude that the DS was an important landmark in videogames history. Though it was impressive that Nintendo had managed to gain the verbal support of so many, it was hard not to imagine the same people saying similarly positive things about the PSP. By now, the near-silent audience was hungry for the answers to four simple questions: when was the DS going to be released? How many units would be available at retail on the date of shipping? What would the launch line-up include? And how much would the machine cost? The answers were not long in coming, and it was the president of Nintendo Europe, Satoru Shibata, who delighted fans and retailers alike. "I am happy to announce that the Nintendo DS will launch in Europe on 11 March. [This is] the fastest launch of a new console in our history. This is not an accident, it is instead a sign of the increasing importance Nintendo is paying to Europe, the fastest-growing videogames market."

The launch date and an acknowledgment of the importance of the European market finally lifted the audience from their diffident stance to a more relaxed, perhaps relieved state. But there was more to come. "Across Europe, more 650,000 DS units will be available at retail from day one, significantly more than were available in Japan or North America… In the UK, the estimated retail price for hardware is £99.99, and software is £29.99 or £19.99." Further proof of Nintendo's commitment was evident in the line-up of launch games – 15 in total, much more than previous Nintendo launches. *Super Mario 64 DS*, *WarioWare Touched!*, *Project Rub*, *Mr Driller: Drill Spirits*, *Spider-Man 2*, *Rayman DS*, *The Urbz*, *Pokémon Dash*, *Sprung*, *Asphalt Urban GT*, *Tiger Woods PGA Tour*, *Zoo Keeper*, *Ping Pals*, *Robots* and *Polarium* will all be available at launch, with a demo of *Metroid Prime: Hunters* included with the machine.

If cynics had denied that Europe was finally being recognised as an important territory, the details of the launch seemed to dispel this – for once, few could complain as Nintendo had delivered on all counts. Nintendo was clearly on a roll and its audience appeared more than happy with what it had heard, but again there was more to come. Not content with proving its support for the territory, it also felt the need to hammer this message home yet further with the appearance of one more special guest…

Satoru Iwata has seemingly made it his business to appear to be a more approachable figurehead of company whose purpose is to entertain people the world over. His appearance on a video screen seemed satisfactory (this was, after all, a European conference). But given the tone of the presentation, few will have been surprised to see Nintendo's president walk on stage. His tone was initially apologetic, but it was given greater gravitas because it came from the man *really* in charge, "Often, Nintendo launches its

TAKING AN EARLY LEAD?

At the time of going to press, the PSP price in the US had just been announced at $250, almost $100 more than was initially expected (in Japan, the PSP costs roughly £108). This has led some to speculate that the PSP will retail in the UK for around £200. Round one, it would seem, goes to Nintendo. For all its sleek desirability, the PSP has been priced beyond that all-important impulse-purchase point. In a further blow to the PSP, unconfirmed reports that it might have slipped from its expected March release date in the UK. Apparently, this is due to an inability to satisfy demand in all three territories, which naturally means that Europe suffers. At £99, the DS remains firmly priced within the realms of the majority of gamers. With Nintendo's proven handheld track record and what could be several months' head start on Sony, the so-called handheld war looks far from being over.





"[THE NINTENDO DS] MUST DELIVER THE MOST GAME QUALITY AND GAME QUANTITY, AND NINTENDO DS WILL ARRIVE IN EUROPE WITH BOTH"
SATORU SHIBATA





products in Europe later than in the other parts of the world because of the need to comply with a number of different regulations… I am always terribly sorry," he said. "However, it does not mean that Nintendo does not consider Europe important. On the contrary, the European market has become increasingly important." Though he spoke at length about the DS, the need to "increase the total videogaming population" and the dead-end that he considered "linear extensions of videogame technology", it was his simple apology and his promise that "Nintendo [was] thinking globally, acting globally, and… will do so more and more as a global company" that carried most weight – it was also a pledge that will be heavily scrutinised over the coming months.

Whether this new-found commitment to Europe remains part of Nintendo's long-term strategy, or whether this is merely a series of false promises in the face of the first real challenge to its handheld dominance, remains to be seen. One thing is for certain – witnessing Nintendo throwing some of its weight around and finally trumpeting the launch of one of its products in a manner that befits the importance of the company has been long overdue, and we can only hope that, as with the promise of better service in Europe, this is a sign of things to come.

A few hours later, as the conference turned into one of those parties that Nintendo has traditionally shunned, it was announced that the get-together had been bigger than any launch event that Sony would hold for the PSP. Even without knowing that Girls Aloud were waiting backstage, few would have disagreed. The only lingering question was whether or not the DS can actually stave off the threat posed by the PSP; whether Nintendo can actually defeat yet another challenge, in spite of the home advantage. On this showing, the impression given was that Nintendo is more than up to the task ahead.

A TOUCH OF CLASS

THE LAUNCH TITLES YOU MUST HAVE

ZOO KEEPER

Okay, this is essentially *Bejewelled* with animals, and yes, you can find perfectly playable versions of this game on the internet (visit www.dsnews.co.uk/zookeeper.php if you want to try it for yourself). However, *Zoo Keeper* on the DS is given new life thanks to the stylus and wireless multiplayer. It might be simple, but it's almost certainly one of the most addictive games you're likely to play all year.

WARIO WARE TOUCHED!

Though perhaps not quite as good as its sister games on the GBA, *Wario Ware Touched!* is still a massively compelling reason to buy a DS. Who could fail to be won over by a game that's as frenetic as it is bizarre, and thanks to the use of the touch screen and voice recognition, looking and sounding like a loon has never been so much fun.

SUPER MARIO 64 DS

Technically, it's the game that helped thrust the N64 onto the world stage, but that's the point, isn't it? Those who baulk at the idea of playing an eight-year-old game should still find plenty to enjoy (not least the myriad bonus games), and those who didn't play it first time around can marvel at one of the best games ever made.

DON'T TOUCH

NOT EVEN WITH YOURS…

ASPHALT URBAN GT

On paper this ought to be the kind of racing game that sets the pulse racing. Wireless multiplayer for up to four players, 20 officially licensed cars that can be customised to your heart's content and nine tracks 'inspired by real cities' sounds like racing heaven. Unfortunately, it's a horrible, glitchy mess that's as difficult on the eye as it is woeful to control.

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR

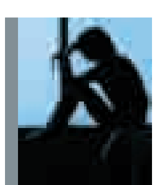
Faced with the DS's lack of analogue control, EA has decided to try a fresh approach for this version of the respected golfing series – that of (you guessed it) using the stylus for the swing mechanic. While we applaud EA's attempt at innovation, it just doesn't work, and though the game itself is as solid as ever, we can't see many people enjoying a round of golf on the DS.

THE URBZ

Fears that the DS will be home to a number of GBA ports seem to have been given some credence by the release of *The Urbz*. Yes, it does use the stylus, and yes, it has been updated to a degree, but on this example, we still can't help but be concerned that some developers will fail to take full advantage of the DS's capabilities.



ASK THE FORUM? WE'D RATHER NOT…



Internet forums can be the bane of a developer's life – so much bile, so much frustration, all hidden behind a luxurious veil of anonymity. Don't get me wrong; the concept of internet gaming communities is one that should appeal, as it gives players of our games somewhere to congregate and share stories. That's great. I'm all for that.

What does get my goat, though, are the places where those who think they know better go to bitch, moan and generally berate anyone and anything that doesn't live up to the ridiculous standards they've set themselves.

These are the people who think they're better gamers just because they buy imports rather than wait for a PAL release; they wade through reams of Japanese text without understanding a word; they've 'been there since the beginning', which obviously makes them more authoritative than everyone else (despite being in the minority). They're also the ones that write off many of today's games without even playing them – just because, once again, they think they know better.

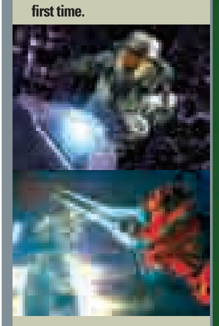
But they don't. They often don't appreciate a game can take years to create, seeing fit to rubbish it in a single post that no doubt takes two minutes to write. They sneer at attempts to capitalise on market trends, spit at sequels and berate improvements to previous titles that they loved. It's as though they've stopped enjoying games and just get thrills out of slating stuff – you know, just for kicks.

Still, there's always one pleasure to be taken from such cynicism. See that game you currently hate? It's riding high in the charts, because normal gamers – the ones who aren't snobbish about their hobby – kind of like it. Stick that in your joypad and smoke it.

MR X WORKS FOR A UK DEVELOPER. HE DID NOT WISH TO BE NAMED.

FROM THE FRONT

THE XBOX HAS FINALLY STARTED PAYING ITS WAY, BUT THE PSTWO HASN'T BROUGHT IN THE CASH FOR SONY



Halo 2 helped the Xbox make a profit for the first time.

THE NUMBERS NEVER LIE

MICROSOFT AND SONY'S LATEST FIGURES TELL DIFFERENT STORIES

Microsoft's financial results have shown that the company's Home Entertainment division has posted a profit for the first time ever.

A profit of $84 million on sales of $1.41 billion for the three months ended 31 December 2004 has been announced, which, when compared to the loss of $397 million on sales of $1.27 billion in the same period in 2003, seems very good indeed.

Thanks to the huge losses the console has incurred to date, it still remains unlikely that the Xbox will ever break even, but finally achieving a profitable quarter is a milestone for Microsoft and reflects both the huge success of *Halo 2* – which has managed to make over $300 million since its launch – and the strong hardware sales that the company enjoyed in various territories throughout the holiday season.

Although Microsoft may be chinking its champagne glasses, Sony's figures haven't been as positive. Its latest figures have revealed the revenues in its videogames division dropped by 23 per cent in the third quarter, with the damage caused by a huge slump in hardware sales (despite reasonable software sales). This decline was expected by all, though, and has been attributed to lower PS2 sales the world over, which came about as a result of the severe lack of stock that affected every territory just after the launch of the slimline PStwo.

However, the company's production shipments figure for the quarter was actually up over the previous year's,



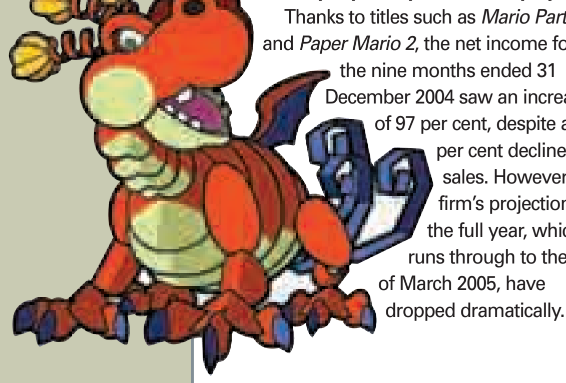
Even Mario's party antics can't raise Nintendo's spirits.

NINTENDO LOWERS PROJECTIONS AS SALES RISE

NINTENDO GETS STUNG

Despite strong income figures for the first nine months of the current financial year, lowered sales expectations for Nintendo's software and hardware have caused a drop in the company's full-year financial projections.

Thanks to titles such as *Mario Party 6* and *Paper Mario 2*, the net income for the nine months ended 31 December 2004 saw an increase of 97 per cent, despite a 4.6 per cent decline in sales. However, the firm's projections for the full year, which runs through to the end of March 2005, have dropped dramatically.



The firm has lowered its net sales projection by 3.7 per cent to ¥520 billion (£2.7 billion), while the net income projection has fallen by 22.2 per cent to ¥70 billion (£359 million). There are many reasons for this change, and although a key factor is the movement in currency exchange rates – something that will always have a huge impact on Nintendo due to its large overseas investments – the company has also noted that sales of its GameCube hardware are slowing. In addition, the fact that the DS is backward compatible has led to lower than expected sales of DS software.

> "ALTHOUGH MICROSOFT MAY BE CHINKING ITS CHAMPAGNE GLASSES, **SONY'S FIGURES HAVEN'T** BEEN AS **POSITIVE**"

increasing by around 560,000 units to 7.39 million. This suggests that many of these units only made it out of the storeroom right at the end of the quarter, and didn't manage to get into shops in time for the Christmas rush. But at least this guarantees a good fourth quarter for Sony.

2002 PROFIT ($ MILLION)

2003 PROFIT ($ MILLION)

2004 PROFIT ($ MILLION)

- Sony
- Microsoft
- Nintendo

ALL'S WELL FOR KONAMI

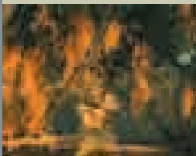
SOLID SNAKE KEEPS KONAMI STABLE

Konami has announced its third-quarter results and the Japanese publisher should be pleased with the way things are looking, with revenues stable and operating income up significantly.

The figures for the three months ended 31 December 2004 show that revenues of ¥81.5 billion (£418 million) were received from its successful Computer And Video Game division, which has received a boost since the successful launches of the company's latest *Metal Gear Solid* and *Pro Evolution Soccer* titles.

These games have contributed towards a rise in operating income of over 20 per cent, rising to ¥16 billion (£82 million). Although this is good news, the figure is actually down by around one per cent compared to this time last year, but the drop in the videogames department is smaller than in some of Konami's other areas.

By the end of this financial year, Konami hopes to have an operating income of ¥28 billion (£144 million).



It's no surprise Konami is doing well when it has Snake on its side.

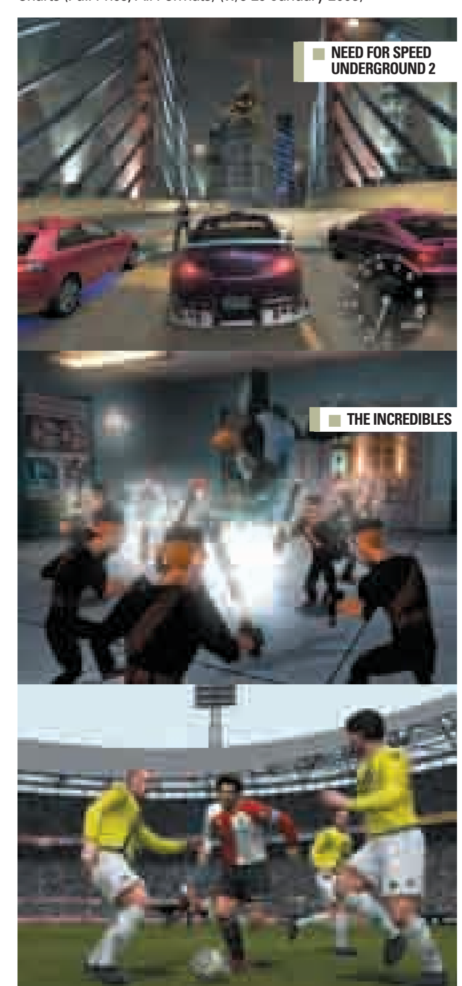


UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Need For Speed Underground 2	EA Games	Multi
2	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	PS2
3	The Incredibles	THQ	Multi
4	Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	Multi
5	FIFA 2005	EA	Multi
6	Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within	Ubisoft	Multi
7	Football Manager 2005	Sega	PC
8	Call Of Duty: Finest Hour	Activision	Multi
9	Halo 2	Microsoft	Xbox
10	LOTR: The Third Age	EA	Multi

Truly, we are a nation of chavs – EA's latest *Need For Speed* title celebrates its tenth week at the top, breaking UK records and becoming the first title to score such a long unbroken run in the All Formats chart. So, who's up for an industry suicide pact?

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of Elspa (UK) Ltd. UK Entertainment Software Sales Charts (Full Price, All Formats) (w/e 29 January 2005)



NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2

THE INCREDIBLES

PRO EVO 4

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES

RELEASE LISTS

Kessen III PS2 Classic strategy, now with added "huunh-huunh-HUNGH!"

Resident Evil 4 Cube Scarier than the 'ideas board' salvaged from Acclaim's offices.

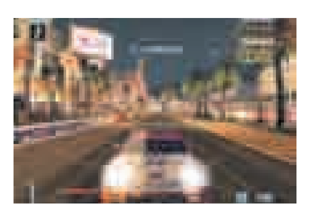
Pariah Multi Because there's more to life than being really, really good-looking….



GRAN TURISMO 4

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sony

Insane. That's the only way to describe just how much there is to do in *GT4*, and it should come as no surprise that even our almighty racing skills are being stretched to their very limits as we speed towards a mountain of trophies and respect. One day, all of those cars will be ours. One day…



STREET FIGHTER: ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Capcom

We finally did it. Alex vs Chun Li. Seventeen parries. Hyper Bomb. Only took us eight years, too… *Street Fighter III* is getting more of our attention than ever before.



MINNA NO GOLF PORTABLE

Format: PSP
Publisher: Sony

Wave goodbye to unnecessarily complex swing systems and realism – this is big-headed golfing fun at its very best. Plenty of challenges, courses and characters (not to mention customisation) ensure that both solo and multiplayer frivolity will be here to stay for months.



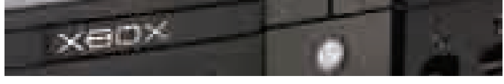
PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
FEBRUARY '05			
25 February	Samurai Warriors: Xtreme Legends	Koei	
25 February	Brothers In Arms	Ubisoft	
25 February	Stolen	Hip Interactive	
25 February	Neo Contra	Konami	
25 February	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	
25 February	Suikoden IV	Konami	
TBC	Project: Snowblind	Eidos	
TBC	Astro Boy	Sega	
TBC	Phantom Crash 2050	Konami	
MARCH '05			
04 March	Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	Wanted
04 March	Rugby 2005	Electronic Arts	
11 March	Gran Turismo 4	Sony	Wanted
11 March	FIFA Street	Electronic Arts	
11 March	Death By Degrees	Sony	
11 March	Fight Night Round 2	Electronic Arts	
11 March	Legend Of Kay	JoWood	
11 March	Shadow Hearts: Covenant	Midway	
18 March	EyeToy: Monkey Mania	Sony	
18 March	Medal Of Honor: Dogs Of War	Electronic Arts	
18 March	TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Wanted
25 March	Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	Wanted
25 March	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Guilty Gear Isuka	Sega	
TBC	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	Wanted
Q1 '05			
TBC	La Pucelle	Koei	
TBC	Kessen III	Koei	Wanted
TBC	King Of Fighters: Maximum Impact	Ignition	
TBC	CT Special Forces: Fire For Effect	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Everybody's Golf 4	Sony	
TBC	MotoGP 4	Sony	
TBC	Cold Winter	Vivendi	
TBC	Rainbow Six 4: Lockdown	Ubi Soft	Wanted
TBC	Red Ninja: End Of Honor	Vivendi	
TBC	The Punisher	THQ	
TBC	Haunting Ground	Capcom	
TBC	Blood Will Tell	Sega	
TBC	SOCOM 3	Sony	
TBC	Okami	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Resident Evil Outbreak: File 2	Capcom	
TBC	NARC	Midway	
TBC	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	
TBC	Far Cry Instincts	Ubisoft	
TBC	Death By Degrees	Sony	
TBC	Champions: Return To Arms	Ubisoft	
TBC	Sniper Elite	TBC	Wanted
TBC	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	Sega	
TBC	Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Monster Hunter	Capcom	Wanted



GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
FEBRUARY '05			
25 February	Mario Power Tennis	Nintendo	
MARCH '05			
11 March	FIFA Street	Electronic Arts	
11 March	Mario Party 6	Nintendo	
11 March	Fight Night Round 2	Electronic Arts	
18 March	Dragon Ball Z Budokai 2	Atari	
18 March	Resident Evil 4	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Baten Kaitos	Nintendo	
Q1 '05			
TBC	Advance Wars: Under Fire	Nintendo	
TBC	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	
TBC	Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Nintendo Puzzle Collection	Nintendo	
TBC	Star Fox Assault	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Odama	Nintendo	
TBC	Area 51	Midway	
TBC	Killer7	Capcom	Wanted

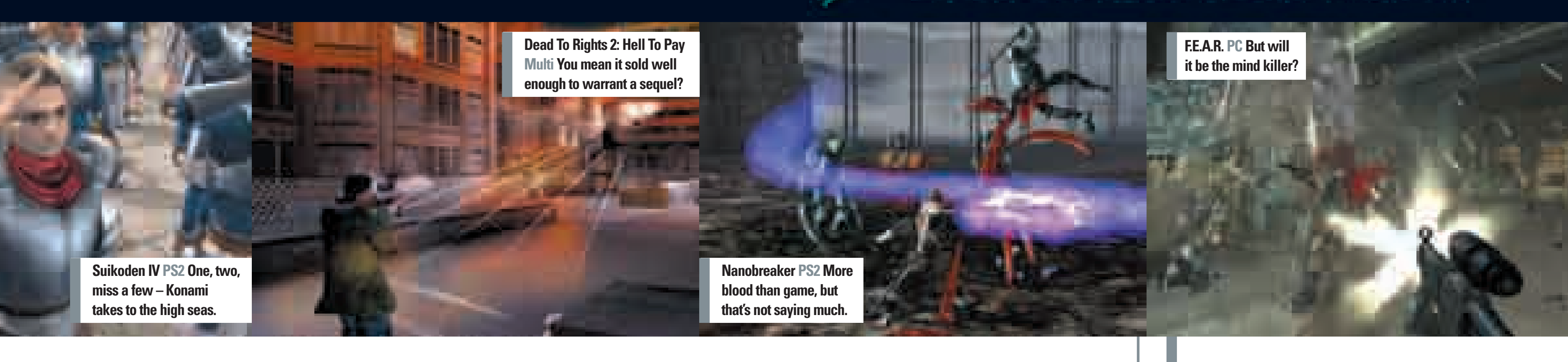


XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher	
FEBRUARY '05			
25 February	Brothers In Arms	Ubisoft	
TBC	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	
TBC	Capcom Fighting Jam	Capcom	
TBC	Project: Snowblind	Eidos	
TBC	Otogi 2	Sega	
TBC	WWE Wrestlemania XXI	THQ	
MARCH '05			
04 March	Close Combat: First To Fight	Take 2	
04 March	Cold Fear	Ubisoft	
04 March	Rugby 2005	Electronic Arts	
11 March	FIFA Street	Electronic Arts	
11 March	Fight Night Round 2	Electronic Arts	
18 March	Medal Of Honor: Dogs Of War	Electronic Arts	
18 March	TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Wanted
25 March	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubi Soft	Wanted
TBC	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	Wanted
Q1 '05			
TBC	Doom 3	Activision	
TBC	Dead Or Alive Ultimate	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict	Midway	Wanted

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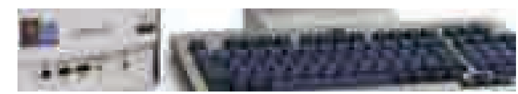
Suikoden IV PS2 One, two, miss a few – Konami takes to the high seas.

Dead To Rights 2: Hell To Pay Multi You mean it sold well enough to warrant a sequel?

Nanobreaker PS2 More blood than game, but that's not saying much.

F.E.A.R. PC But will it be the mind killer?

TBC	Pariah	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Rainbow Six 4: Lockdown	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Sniper Elite	TBC	Wanted
TBC	Star Wars: Republic Commando	Activision	
TBC	Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Wanted
TBC	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	Wanted
TBC	Far Cry Instincts	Ubi Soft	
TBC	CT Special Forces: Fire For Effect	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Forza Motorsport	Microsoft	
TBC	Half-Life 2	Vivendi	
TBC	Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	Sega	
TBC	NARC	Midway	
TBC	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	
TBC	Area 51	Midway	
TBC	Conker: Live And Reloaded	Microsoft	
TBC	Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Wanted
TBC	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	
TBC	Jade Empire	Microsoft	Wanted



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
FEBRUARY '05			
25 February	Brothers In Arms	Ubisoft	
25 February	GTR	Atari	
25 February	The Roots	Cenega	
25 February	Stolen	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Immortal Cities: Children Of The Nile	Sega	
TBC	The Matrix Online	Sega	
TBC	Second Sight	Codemasters	
MARCH '05			
04 March	Star Wars: Republic Commando	Activision	
04 March	Close Combat: First To Fight	Take Two	
04 March	Cold Fear	Ubisoft	
04 March	Trackmania Sunrise	Digital Jesters	Wanted
18 March	Act Of War: Direct Action	Atari	Wanted
25 March	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	Wanted
TBC	Cossacks 2: Napoleonic Wars	CDV	
Q1 '05			
TBC	Battlefield 2	Electronics Arts	Wanted
TBC	CT Special Forces: Fire For Effect	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Duke Nukem Forever	Vivendi	
TBC	Bet On Soldier	Digital Jesters	
TBC	The Matrix Online	Warner Bros	
TBC	Settlers: Heritage Of Kings	Ubisoft	
TBC	Sniper Elite	TBC	Wanted
TBC	World Of Warcraft	Vivendi	Wanted
TBC	UFO: Aftershock	Cenega	
TBC	Pariah	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	
TBC	Black & White 2	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	Wanted

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
FEBRUARY '05			
25 February	Kingdom Hearts: Chain Of Memories	Buena Vista	
TBC	Yu-Gi-Oh! World Championship Tournament 2005	Konami	
TBC	Banjo Pilot	THQ	
MARCH '05			
TBC	Mario Party Advance	Nintendo	
Q1 '05			
TBC	Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django	Konami	
TBC	Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	F-Zero Climax	Nintendo	
TBC	Wario Ware: Twisted!	Nintendo	Wanted

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Month	Title	Publisher	
MARCH '05			
18 March	PlayStation Portable Hardware	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Ridge Racers	Namco	Wanted
TBC	Darkstalkers Chronicles	Capcom	
TBC	Dynasty Warriors	Koei	
TBC	Wipeout Pure	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Hot Shots Golf	Sony	
TBC	Lumines	TBC	Wanted
Q1 '05			
TBC	Metal Gear Ac!d	Konami	Wanted
TBC	NFL Street 2	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Armored Core: Formula Front	TBC	
TBC	FIFA 2005	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Ape Escape	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Need For Speed Underground Rivals	Electronic Arts	
TBC	NBA Street Showdown	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Gran Turismo 4 Mobile	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Tiger Woods 2005	Electronic Arts	

NINTENDO DS

Month	Title	Publisher	
MARCH '05			
11 March	Nintendo DS Hardware	Nintendo	Wanted
11 March	Wario Ware: Touched!	Nintendo	Wanted
11 March	Pokémon Dash	Nintendo	
11 March	Super Mario 64 DS	Nintendo	Wanted
11 March	Zoo Keeper	Ignition	
11 March	Project Rub	Sega	
11 March	Urbz: Sims In The City	Electronic Arts	
11 March	Spider-Man 2	Activision	
11 March	Mr Driller: Drill Spirits	TBC	Wanted
Q1 '05			
TBC	Mario Kart DS	Nintendo	
TBC	Animal Crossing	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Ridge Racer DS	Namco	
TBC	Yu-Gi-Oh! Nightmare Troubadour	Konami	
TBC	Tiger Woods 2005	Electronic Arts	

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.

games™ ON THE HORIZON

PIRATE BATTLE

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: TBC
Why didn't we think of this? Blending two of the most awesome things ever – *Advance Wars* and scurvy pirates – Orbital's forthcoming strategy title already has us downing flagons of grog and intentionally tainting our biscuit supplies with weevils. Splice the mainbrace and all that.



CASTLEVANIA DS (WORKING TITLE)

Format: DS
Publisher: Konami
Okay, Konami. Good one. Obviously the best way to further the massively popular *Castlevania* franchise is by using a pen to fight the forces of evil. You almost had us going for a minute there. What? This isn't a joke? Oh dear…



ODAMA

Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Unlike *Pirate Battle, Odama*'s fusion of concepts isn't quite as obvious. The idea to merge pinball with warfare is as silly as a cow in a crash helmet, but from what we've seen *Odama* could be a strangely compelling (and just downright strange) dark horse as the curtain slowly falls on the GameCube.





“Whoever named your car the Bull was only half right!” **New Rally X – Arcade [Namco] 1981**



HI-SCORE
36100
1UP
36100
FUEL
ROUND 4

"WE WANTED TO CREATE A NEW WORLD, SOMETHING THAT ALLOWED US TO HAVE A LOT OF ACTION AND FLEXIBILITY AND BE ABLE TO TELL INTERESTING STORIES"
JAMES SCHMALZ, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, DIGITAL EXTREMES

IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE?

PARIAH

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC, Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Hip Interactive
DEVELOPER: Digital Extremes
RELEASE: 3 May '05
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: TBC

CONCEPT

■ This will be your chance to play doctor as you take on a hostile planet and attempt to find out the secrets of your virus-ridden colleagues.

HISTORY

■ Digital Extremes' latest project will take the form of an action-packed FPS, a genre in which the company has had plenty of experience.

It's been a fine time for the FPS lover. In fact, the last six months have provided some of the greatest titles the genre has ever seen. But even after the wait for *Halo 2* was over, *Doom 3* had dished out all the scares it was ever going to manage, and *Half-Life 2* had shown us everything you could ever wish to wave a crowbar at, we still found ourselves waiting for the next FPS that will push the genre that little bit further. Why, some of us even put ourselves through the misery of *GoldenEye: Rogue Agent* in the hope that it wasn't actually as dire as the opening level led us to believe.

Of course, these hopes were dashed by the time we'd reached the second level, but with all these titles now completed and most either gathering dust or only being removed from their packaging for a spot of multiplayer action, there was still one game that was content to lurk on our radar with no release date hinted at and apparently no interest in ever becoming playable – and that game was *Pariah*.

Well, the time has finally arrived and the now very playable *Pariah* is on its way. After months of secrecy and only a few teasing glimpses of what was to come, James Schmalz, creative director at Digital Extremes, is keen to tell us all about it.

"You play Jack Mason, a military doctor in the year 2520, who's been called down on a routine transfer mission to escort a prisoner who you've been told has a virus," he explains. "You're supposed to take her off planet to a medical facility. All routine and simple except that as you're transferring her off, you get shot out of the sky and go crashing down into the wastelands around the prison. So your first goal is to try to survive and get Karina, the prisoner, and yourself back to safety. As things unfold, you begin to find out more about her, the virus and what's really going on at the prison."

Although it's safe to assume that we'll never tire of the humble FPS, it's much more difficult to predict how well a title will fare when thrown into the genre. As already mentioned, we've seen a selection of gorgeous additions of late and although *Pariah*'s belated arrival could well have been a strategy to avoid clashing with said titles, it means it will have far more to live up to as the bar is now so high.

"It is a tough genre to be competing in because it requires experimentation and ▷



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Headquartered in London, Ontario, Digital Extremes got its foothold in the industry through the shareware craze during the early Nineties. The company then went on to create the highly acclaimed *Unreal* series with Epic Games, though the two developers have now parted ways.

HISTORY

- **UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004** 2004 [PC]
- **UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP** 2002 [Xbox]
- **EPIC PINBALL** 1993 [PC]



risk," Schmalz admits. "You have to spend the time to try something new and be prepared to go back to the drawing board if it isn't fun enough. It's hard to predict 'fun' without prototyping it and actually trying it. Then you don't want to get too crazy because people might not understand it. There are a good number of fun games that don't sell well each year because the idea behind the fun might be a little too abstract or off the beaten path for the casual gamer to appreciate until they actually play it. So there is a fine line between innovation and commercial success, both of which you should have in adequate amounts in any good product."

If balancing these two aspects wasn't hard enough, there are also other practical concerns to consider. "The biggest challenges for any game developer are always making a title fun but also making it on time," says Schmalz. "It's easy enough to make content and nice visuals. It's hard to predict whether what you are trying is going to be fun unless you are only redoing an old idea. We're not."

So what exactly is it that will guarantee *Pariah* hits all the right buttons with gamers who may well be tired of shooting in the first person? "For *Pariah*, it's the upgradeable weapons and the editor that are the big items," Schmalz explains. "There are hundreds more ways in which *Pariah* is different, but those are the easiest ones to point out. I'd also like to stress that the map editor is not just for Live users, although there are cool features on Live for it. We have found it especially cool to play edited maps just in one-on-one split screen with no system link or Xbox Live – it's a great feature for any Xbox set-up."

After playing the game ourselves, Schmalz's comments prove to be true. There's plenty of innovation to found if you take the time to notice it. Our favourite element was the range of weaponry. Although the standard arms that you'd expect to find in any reputable FPS make up the majority of the inventory, everything in your arsenal can be upgraded up to three times to further its abilities and aid in making your favourite weapon that little bit more dangerous. This is done by picking up WECs (Weapon Energy Cores) from inside the levels and then making your own selection about where you'd like to store them. Although this does point towards a limited level of customisation, this system will ultimately reward the more talented players.

"We had a lot of debate about the weaponry internally and we think we came up with the best solution," says Schmalz. "There are just enough WECs to fully upgrade all weapons in the game, but the catch is some are incredibly hard to find, so the average gamer will go through the game and upgrade their favourite weapons but might end up finishing the game with a couple weapons not fully upgraded. Perhaps this might encourage

WHERE THERE'S A WHEEL…

After throwing weeks into *Halo 2* over the last couple of months we've become pretty reliant on vehicles in our deathmatches – it's just not the same unless you can screech past your enemy while leaving a trail of gunfire and chuckling from the supposed safety of your Banshee. This is a feeling that we'll be experiencing a lot more when *Pariah* arrives. "We have a good mix of vehicles that give you different functionality in both single-player and multiplayer, each with a different set of weapons and each useful in their own way," James Schmalz tells us. "We did adopt the third-person view which makes it easier to control. *Halo* has trained a vast number of people on how to drive using this style, so we have a similar control scheme and thus anyone who has played *Halo* will be familiar with our controls. We have definitely adjusted it to be as fun to drive as possible, so we have leaned more toward fun and enjoyable versus realistic."

> "THERE IS A FINE LINE BETWEEN INNOVATION AND COMMERCIAL SUCCESS, BOTH OF WHICH YOU SHOULD HAVE IN ADEQUATE AMOUNTS IN ANY GOOD PRODUCT"
> *JAMES SCHMALZ, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, DIGITAL EXTREMES*

HEALING HANDS

A key feature in *Pariah* will be your ability to heal yourself whenever you've taken a beating by using your own portable med kit, an item that no GP should be without. While at first this may sound a foolish idea that would make a game about as challenging as a four-piece jigsaw, it's an area where Digital Extremes has spent a while finding the perfect balance. "This is something we have changed a little in the last couple of months for that exact difficulty reason," admits James Schmalz. "It's now definitely more limited but we do feel we have a nice compromise that everyone will be happy with. You will have to wait to play the finished game to see."



The environments you can create in the map editor are looking very impressive at this stage.

YOU'VE GOT TO WATCH YOUR FRIENDS

DON'T BE AN OUTCAST – PARIAH SHOWS THAT YOU CAN GET BY WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM YOUR FRIENDS

If there's one thing that can make a good title better, it's a decent multiplayer mode. Digital Extremes is well aware of this fact and has included all the regular options that you'd expect to find with a Live-compatible FPS as well as plenty of new touches to make the experience that little bit more special. "The multiplayer experience is one of the things that turned out really cool," says James Schmalz. "It's the sheer number of things you can do. There's split-screen, co-op, playing against bots in multiplayer… the list goes on and on. So, yes, we have tried to make the multiplayer experience quite different and refreshing. We have a really cool new game type called Front Line Assault which tries to mimic the fight over the frontline in a war between two armies, so it is objective based. Overall, the multiplayer focuses very heavily on team play."

THE ENEMY

Pariah **will be pitting you against various types of enemy, but these prisoners that inhabit the planet will be the most common.**

PROGRESS

The team at Digital Extremes is working towards making ***Pariah*** **even greater than the** ***Unreal*** **series – and hopefully just as popular.**

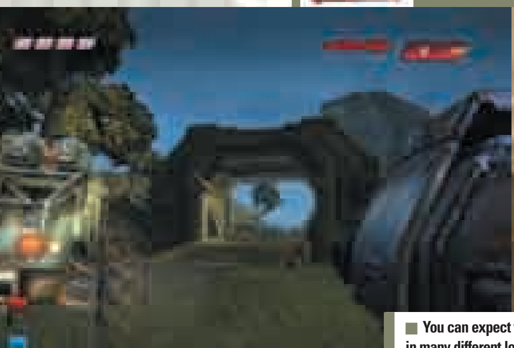


DOCTOR PROFILE

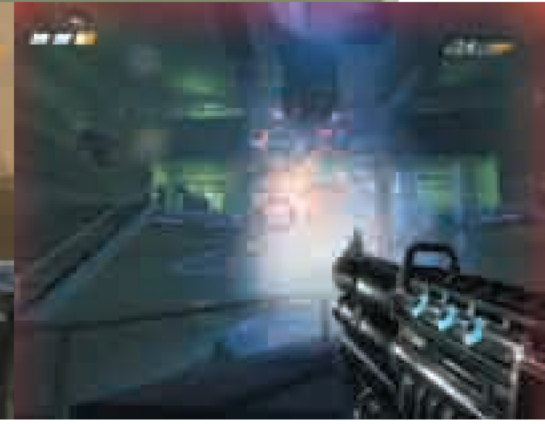
■ Although they may be considered essential in real life, doctors make unlikely videogame heroes. In fact, it's probably fair to say that most docs found in games nowadays are of the mad scientist variety.

HISTORY

- **DR. MUTO** 2002 [Multi]
- **THE LOST MIND OF DOCTOR BRAIN** 1995 [PC]
- **DR. MARIO** 1990 [NES]







■ You can expect to be doing battle in many different locations, every one of them boasting new threats.

them to play again. But the badass player who searches hard for the WECs should be able to upgrade everything by the end. It's damn tricky, though. Hopefully that's a balance everyone can appreciate."

Digital Extremes is best known for the highly acclaimed *Unreal* games, a series that managed to make multiplayer monsters out of many a gamer and set most of the rules that are found in every other offering. With this in mind, it's hardly surprising that a huge amount of effort has been put in to making *Pariah*'s multiplayer options as fulfilling as possible.

"Almost all of our multiplayer levels have been created in an outdoor environment," Schmalz explains. "Not only to make them different from games we have worked on before, but also to take advantage of the vehicles and some of the very fast outdoor environment-drawing technology we have added to the *Unreal* engine. Also, the upgradeable weapons really give a different feel to multiplayer overall as compared to products we've played lately. Everything came together so nicely and we got more in the game than we had even hoped for. A lot of the time developers will try to do huge amounts of stuff and then have to cut features. We were a bit worried about getting split-screen and co-op in, but we did manage to do it all, which is very satisfying."

With this kind of care and attention going into the game it's no surprise that the various other gadgets, game modes and forms of transportation seem to be just as well planned out, and although *Pariah* is currently suffering from a few AI issues, it's likely that by the time it reaches the shelves all traces of error will be ironed out and we may be treated to yet another FPS that we can add to the list of titles that we've played to death.

"We hope so too," adds Schmalz. "It's very rewarding for us and I think we have put together something really special and we are quite proud of the game. We're crossing our fingers that a lot of the gamers out there will like it too. That's all we can hope for." Although it's doubtful that *Pariah* will be nudging any FPS titles off their thrones, it's certainly looking promising. All will be revealed come May.

"GIVEN DIGITAL EXTREME'S UNREAL HERITAGE, A HUGE AMOUNT OF EFFORT HAS GONE INTO MAKING PARIAH'S MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS AS FULFILLING AS POSSIBLE"

TRIGGER HAPPY

There will be a vast range of weapons available in *Pariah*, each with its own set of unique upgrades.







■ This doctor will happily swap his everyday tools for a nice SMG. He'll keep hold of that med kit though.



WELCOME TO YOUR WORLD

One aspect of *Pariah* that looks exciting is the option of making and publishing your own maps. You'll even be able to share your lovingly crafted locations with others on Live. This ability to build your own dream battlegrounds and post them up for all players to see and use is bound to attract many to the title and puts us in mind of a magnet-covered fridge door that hosts a collection of children's artistic attempts for all to enjoy. "We are very proud of the map editor," says Schmalz. "We really hope the people who buy *Pariah* enjoy it as much as we do. It was built specifically for *Pariah* with the idea of having an editor that is powerful but with little to no learning curve to use; something that anyone can pick up and use and create something fun. It should be almost as easy to use as the game itself."

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE DOCTOR IS IN

DOOM 3 - SCARES + DOCTOR = PARIAH

■ The vehicle sections should provide a welcome change from the frantic FPS action.

STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR

MANAGE YOUR WAY OUT OF THE DEATH STAR

It's been well documented that *Star Wars* games have enjoyed a surge in quality over the last year or so in a range of genres – RPG, FPS, third-person action… But *Star Wars* strategy games have always sucked. Previous PC strategy outings in the *Star Wars* universe have been hugely disappointing, with *Force Commander* flopping miserably and *Galactic Battlegrounds* proving to be little more than an *Age Of Kings* mod. But now we can look ahead to this RTS from LucasArts free of the emotional baggage that the *Star Wars* licence always seems to carry.

Empire At War has strategy fans and *Star Wars* fanboys equally excited, even though details have only recently been released. One of the reasons for the anticipation level is the involvement of Petroglyph, a studio staffed by ex-Westwood employees. The industry is understandably keen to see whether the innovation that Westwood Studios showed in developing the RTS genre will continue now that the individuals responsible for that exciting period have been freed of the shackles that they worked under following EA's acquisition of the studio.

The game itself covers the entire *Star Wars* franchise so as well as events from the recent films, gamers will be able to recreate classic confrontations like the battle of Hoth and the assault on the Death Star. It's set to feature space battles and ground-based combat, with the player able to assume the role of either Rebel scum or evil Empire overlord.

The way campaigns work will see players able to battle in space then send ground troops in to capture enemy-controlled planets and build from there. This simple system looks set to greatly increase the variation in gameplay as not only will players be able to conduct huge 'naval' battles with Destroyers and launch large attacks on enemy planets, they'll also be able to send smaller groups of units into skirmish battles. This will include attacking enemy planets with a small force, not with the intention of taking the planet but instead to neutralise key installations there, leaving other planets defenceless.

The campaign will present established 'existing' battles alongside fictional 'what-if' scenarios that will allow the game to develop in its own direction yet still give it a degree of accessibility for *Star Wars* fans taking their first steps into the strategy gaming world. This really adds to the appeal of the title, especially when combined with the feeling that each battle is not a standalone skirmish between two isolated groups of troops, but part of a bigger, galaxy-wide campaign. Petroglyph is promising that events in one battle on one planet can have a far-reaching impact on a battle elsewhere in the universe as, say, a forcefield generator is taken down.

Petroglyph is also concentrating on streamlining extraneous elements of RTS gaming, with resource management firmly in the developer's crosshairs. Instead of sending droids out to mine metal and gather wood (yawn), it would appear that simple ownership of a planet will be enough to generate its resources and channel them into a player's stockpile.

It sounds promising. It looks promising. With any luck, the history books will be rewritten and *Star Wars* fans can finally get the strategy fix they've wanted for so long.

"YOU'LL BE ABLE TO RECREATE CLASSIC CONFRONTATIONS LIKE THE BATTLE OF HOTH AND THE ASSAULT ON THE DEATH STAR"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: LucasArts
DEVELOPER: Petroglyph
RELEASE: Q4 '05
GENRE: RTS
PLAYERS: 1-TBA

CONCEPT

The game that *Star Wars* fans have hoped for, combining space battles with ground combat, set against the backdrop of the war to save the galaxy…

MIX AND MATCH

As an example of how space and land battles co-exist, a player wanting to take over an enemy planet will have to transport ground units to their target with a fighter escort. Provided the planet has aerial protection a space battle will ensue in which the defending units will not only try to take out the fighters, but destroy the transports too. If the invaders are successful, the ground units will take part in a battle on the planet's surface, and if they suffered heavy losses prior to landing, their task is all the more perilous. Reinforcements can be sent for, but a savvy defending team will almost certainly have blockaded the planet…



For empire-building on the move, a space station is a handy portable base.

Well, you could let your troops stand there, or they could hide behind those trees…



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Although Petroglyph might not be the biggest name in games development yet, the fact that the company is staffed by a number of former Westwood Studios employees should be enough to get strategy fans excited.

HISTORY

STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR is the first game from Petroglyph

You can't just waltz onto any old planet – you might have to fight your way on.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

EMPIRE BUILDING

SW: GALACTIC BATTLEFIELDS + DUNE 2 + HOMEWORLD 2 = STAR WARS: EMPIRE AT WAR

"THIS IS AN RTS CRAFTED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO INTRODUCE INNOVATION AND REMOVE SOME OF THE TEDIOUS ASPECTS THAT HAVE CREPT INTO THE GENRE"

PETROGLYPH PRESS RELEASE

FORZA MOTORSPORT



■ Hit something too hard and you'll lose your spoiler. Which would be, like, totally embarrassing.

■ Whatever Microsoft tells you, *Forza* doesn't look like this. It's nice enough but not this nice…

"OBVIOUSLY THE GRAN TURISMO SERIES HAS BEEN A HUGE INFLUENCE ON THIS TEAM"

DAN GREENAWALT, DESIGNER, MICROSOFT

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ONE, TWO, THREE, RED LIGHT

GRAN TURISMO 4 + ONLINE PLAY - 500 CARS = FORZA



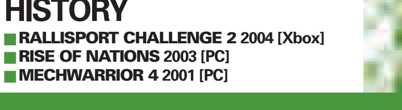


DEVELOPER PROFILE

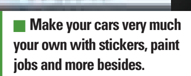
■ Microsoft's in-house team has quite a history in PC gaming and its recent slew of quality Xbox titles can probably be put down, in part, to this experience. Covering everything from strategy to action shooters, Microsoft Game Studio's variety and consistency make it a force to be reckoned with.

HISTORY

■ **RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2** 2004 [Xbox]
■ **RISE OF NATIONS** 2003 [PC]
■ **MECHWARRIOR 4** 2001 [PC]







■ Make your cars very much your own with stickers, paint jobs and more besides.



MICROSOFT'S SIMULATION NEEDS AN URGENT PIT STOP

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: May '05
GENRE: Driving
PLAYERS: 1-2 (2-8 Online)

CONCEPT

■ Another realistic racer joins the fray, this one claiming to be the most in-depth yet. But can Microsoft turn around what looks to be a slightly flagging simulation before release?

We're always hearing that games are 'so-and-so's answer to Game X'. Apparently, *Cold Fear* is Ubisoft's answer to *Resident Evil*, *Rumble Roses* is Konami's answer to *Dead Or Alive*, and *Project: Snowblind* is Eidos' answer to *Halo* (which makes us think the question was misheard). While we're not fond of such terms, there can be no way of seeing *Forza Motorsport* as anything other than a direct retaliation to *Gran Turismo 4*. And if that's the case, Microsoft might want to hammer out a few dents before parading this boy racer.

In its attempt to oust Polyphony's series from its racing throne, *Forza* is packing everything the *GT* series has ever promised and more. Customisation on the 200-plus vehicles is stupidly in-depth both cosmetically and beneath the bonnet, the range of options stretching from simple tuning to full mod kits. But everything comes at a price. To buy cars, upgrades and such you'll need to plough through a 'career' mode similar to – you guessed it – *Gran Turismo*. There are neat touches here, such as turning off the driving assists or allowing realistic damage to increase your income from competitions, but in essence, this is *GT* for the Xbox. Which, we'd wager, is exactly what Microsoft was looking to create and exactly what the public wants.

Taking the same obsessive route as Polyphony's series and opening it up a little, *Forza* will cater for every level of driver. For the rookie, assists galore will help keep you on the track while a glowing racing line shows where you should be driving. Mid-level players can knock down the assistance and lose the line, even tweaking settings slightly; while those who really know what they're doing can adjust everything from tyre pressure to camber, down force to ride height and beyond.

The same goes for damage. Beginners will be able to throw even the most delicate ride into barriers without too much comeback, but as your skills improve you can ramp up how fragile your car is to make sure you need to stay on the track.

> "MICROSOFT'S IN-HOUSE RACERS HAVE A WORRYING HISTORY OF BEING REALLY ROPEY AT PREVIEW STAGE"

It's not purely cosmetic, either – smashes affect handling and you'll need to shell out many pennies to get your wheels fixed between races.

But in its current state, even its own mother would have a hard time loving *Forza*. Despite some slightly wayward visuals (cars feel like they're hovering above the tarmac, while lighting and damage modelling are a little unconvincing), the frame rate still struggles to keep up, making the game virtually unplayable in places. Handling and the sensation of speed both seem fair, however, if not up to *GT4*'s standard, and AI appears to be just as middling as in Sony's latest.

While we were a little disappointed with our time with *Forza*, we realised one crucial thing: Microsoft's in-house racers have a history of being really ropey at preview stage. Both *Project Gotham Racing 2* and *RalliSport Challenge 2* looked to be in danger of being horrible right up to the eleventh hour, before review copies turned more than a few frowns upside down. It seems to be the way development works at Microsoft Game Studios – get content in first before optimising later.

Then again, perhaps this is all a big ploy – pretend your game is rubbish right until the last minute and, provided the final product is at least okay, a lot of people will be pleasantly surprised. Quiet optimism has returned to the office once more. Microsoft, if you're reading this, don't let us down…

ROLF'S CAR-TUNE CLUB

While most aspects of *Forza* still need fine-tuning in order for the game to be a real contender, there is one element guaranteed to get one over on *GT4*. As well as having enough races and modding potential to keep you playing until the release of the inevitable Xbox 2 sequel, online functionality should prolong *Forza*'s lifespan further still. You'll be able to form car clubs with friends and trade cars, as well as enjoy the usual selection of racing options – and to make it better yet, you'll still be earning money the whole time. If only for the ability to show off our funky pink beast of a car to the rest of the world, we'll be interested to check out *Forza* online.

KESSEN III

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE AMBITION BEHIND NOBUNAGA'S AMBITION

PS2 **If there's an area of Koei's last foray into the action-strategy genre, *Kessen II*, that could be earmarked for much-needed improvement it's the voice acting.** Not only in terms of the generally low-quality delivery of lines that mires many games, but also the ill-fitting length of each soundbite, always threatening to be bookended by silence and a character moving their lips like a distressed Koi carp.

Blame SCEA if you must – after all, it's its insistence on dubbed games curtails certainly the most graceful solution we can think of (that of native language and subtitles). Indeed, if any title were to benefit from the illusion of authenticity this approach provides it's this one, steeped in medieval Japanese history and culture.

When told that many western players preferred subtitles, Koei's chairman and CEO, Keiko Erikawa, said she'd petition her friend Ken Kutaragi to allow this option. That didn't work, though, because the latest build of *Kessen III* we've seen is fully dubbed. Thankfully, however, it's to a much higher standard than its predecessor and in fact complements the high-quality CG cut-scenes that punctuate battles.

That's not the only change. Most notable is the marked evolution of the series, now exhibiting a more action-oriented bias – a move designed to please fans of both *Kessen* and *Dynasty Warriors*.

"*Kessen* users wanted us to add the action game part for the new *Kessen* because there are many *Dynasty Warriors* game fans and also they love *Kessen*," explains producer Kou Shibusawa.

Facilitating a more *Dynasty Warriors*-style approach is the new 'crowd engine', dramatically increasing the number of troops displayed on screen. Unlike in *Dynasty Warriors* players control not an individual soldier but a small cavalry team who attack in formation. While the bare mechanics of troop-on-troop combat may not be as fleshed-out as the *Warriors* series, they're adequately reinforced by the series' trademark strategy elements.

The first is the marshalling of multiple units via a map screen, which works in a similar manner to *Kessen II* – troops have a start point, a route of attack and an end target. This all happens under the auspices of the War Council, where officers can be assigned to certain units and unit behaviour dictated. Back on the battlefield, the scope of the game is hinted at when multiple units engage enemies spread over the map. While you take direct control of one unit, allied troops will engage enemies independently, though if you doubt the AI behaviour you can cycle through units and take a more hands-on approach.

It's the multiple attack and defend options that really add spice, however – Ninja and Summon Beasts such as giant serpents can be called upon, and attacks co-ordinated with allies to rout the enemy. Further depth is afforded by the levelling up of troop commanders – depending on their performance in battle – with points awarded for the defeat of enemy generals and the like. Experience points can then be spent on a selection of over 450 upgrades including helmets and armour.

This mix of action and tactical depth could see *Kessen III* becoming a successful crossover title. And at least the dubbing's better this time…

"THE NEW 'CROWD ENGINE' DRAMATICALLY INCREASES THE NUMBER OF TROOPS DISPLAYED ON SCREEN AT ONCE"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Koei
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: April '05
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

Kessen III is all about fan service. Following the suggestions of countless followers of *Kessen* and *Dynasty Warriors*, Koei has combined *Kessen*'s strategy with *Dynasty Warriors*-style action.

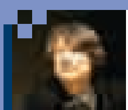
CULTURAL ARTEFACT

Kessen III encompasses a trio of Kou Shibusawa's passions: first his love of programming and game production that saw the _Kessen_ series come to fruition in the first place; second, his love of Sansui culture – the movement that gave rise to Japanese artists using vibrant colour in their art for the first time; and third, his respect for the historical figure Oda Nobunaga. Unlike Capcom, which seemingly views Nobunaga as a washed-out Ming the Merciless clone, Shibusawa sees him as an idealist and visionary. So too will players of _Kessen III_ – he's the game's hero and you'll lead him to become one of the most powerful daimyo in Japan. We assume that there'll be no running into a samurai by the name of Samanosuke Okechi…



You can knock and ask nicely to be let in. Or you could just charge. Your call.





DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Former chairman and CEO of Koei, Kou Shibusawa returned to full-time videogame production when the PS2 was released, armed with a game concept that turned into the *Kessen* series. He has also produced *Nobunaga's Ambition, Crimson Sea, Winning Post* and *P.T.O.* titles for Koei.

HISTORY

- **SAMURAI WARRIORS XTREME LEGENDS** 2005 [PS2]
- **KESSEN II** 2002 [PS2]
- **DYNASTY WARRIORS TACTICS** 2002 [PS2]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THIRD TIME'S THE CHARM

KESSEN II + DYNASTY WARRIORS + CULTURE = KESSEN III

"THE CONCEPT OF KESSEN III IS GAME AND MOVIE, SO HALF OF THE ENJOYMENT IS 'JUST LOOK, SEE THE MOVIE' AND HALF OF IT IS DIRECTLY PLAYING THE GAME"
KOU SHIBUSAWA, PRODUCER, KOEI

■ Your allies are governed by AI, but if you think you could do better just take over.

■ The occasional supernaturally charged strike can be pretty useful.

UNTOLD LEGENDS: BROTHERHOOD OF THE BLADE



Like similar titles, *Untold Legends* has those 'little number' enemies that are really hard to hit.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSP
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBC (US: March)
GENRE: RPG
PLAYERS: 1 (2-4 via Wi-Fi)

CONCEPT

The goblin-loving chaps behind *Champions Of Norrath* and *EverQuest* try their hand at a US launch title for the PSP.

IT'S GOOD TO SLAY TOGETHER

While we're sure we're far from alone in enjoying a quick blast on *Lumines* or *Ridge Racers* from time to time, it would take someone with a ridiculously short attention span to argue that the PSP couldn't use something with a little more meat on it. And no sooner had that notion first popped into our brains than Sony Online Entertainment announced that it was putting together *Untold Legends: Brotherhood Of The Blade*, an action RPG in the vein of *Champions Of Norrath*. So rejoice did we, the merry (if slightly foolhardy) warriors who had bested campaigns at both Baldur's Gate and Norrath at the expense of many an hour.

A quick glance at one of the more colourful areas of this page should tell you virtually all you need to know about *Untold Legends*. While clearly cast from the same mould as the likes of *Norrath*, the 'original' story (if you can even call it that) sees a bastion of brave warriors uniting to protect the stronghold of Aven by venturing forth and hacking up lots of enemies. As with almost every entry in this genre it's impossible to sell it to someone through a description, but if you've felt the overwhelming empowerment of the later stages of any such game you'll undoubtedly have a taste for more.

But while the idea of mass slaughter on the move is an endearing enough prospect on its own, it's the promise of Wi-Fi multiplayer that has really attracted our undivided attention. Again, games like *Baldur's Gate* and *Norrath* sported great multiplayer modes but when quick fix social gaming is so rife and enjoyable, opportunities to get a mate round for a five-hour killathon are understandably few. This way, all it takes is to be near a potential comrade and the world-cleansing can begin, usually culminating in a four-figure death toll and a fight over who took all the Health Vials, if our experience is anything to go by.

Going into *Untold Legends* expecting some degree of revolutionary gaming experience will undoubtedly lead to disappointment. Take it at face value, however, and it could be just what the PSP needs – the genre is well suited to the portable platform and we know from its past efforts that SOE is unlikely to mess up something it must now find so familiar. Sony's 'All-the-hacking-and-slashing-you-can-eat' deal starts at the end of March.

"TEAM UP WITH FRIENDS OVER THE PSP'S WI-FI CONNECTION FOR UP TO FOUR TIMES THE DEATH WHILE YOU'RE ON THE MOVE"



Ah, spiders – the staple ingredient of every action RPG since the dawn of time.


eMag

FREEDOM FORCE VS THE 3RD REICH



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

"NOCH EINMAL STÜRMT, NOCH EINMAL, LIEBEN FREUNDE!"

ROLE PLAY × CLICHÉS + NAZIS = FFVT3R

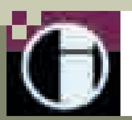
"FFVT3R BRINGS DYNAMIC STORYTELLING, TACTICAL ROLE PLAY AND LARGER-THAN-LIFE CHARACTERS TO THE SCREEN"

OFFICIAL FREEDOM FORCE WEBSITE

Some heroes are needed on certain missions – The Ant, for example, must dig under walls.

FREEDOM FORCE VS THE 3RD REICH

PC



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Founded in 1997, Irrational Games is a developer dedicated to bringing RPG and strategy titles to the videogame market. Having expanded its operations to two different studios (based in Boston, US, and Braddon, Australia), it has been responsible for several games that have managed to capture the imaginations of PC gamers around the world.

HISTORY

- TRIBES: VENGEANCE 2004 [PC]
- FREEDOM FORCE 2002 [PC]
- SYSTEM SHOCK 2 1999 [PC]



■ Just one of the many comic-book clichés – a few *Batman*-style visual sound effects.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Digital Jesters
DEVELOPER: Irrational Games
RELEASE: April '05
GENRE: Action/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ More clichéd comic-book stylings from Irrational Games as its Freedom Force returns, this time to fend off the evil Nazi hordes with its real-time action abilities.

HOLY REAL-TIME STRATEGY ACTION!

See that huge lump sticking out of the side of *Freedom Force Vs The 3rd Reich*? That's a tongue – a huge, comic-book tongue wedged so firmly into the game's cheek that we doubt Irrational Games will ever manage to remove it (not without an oversized pair of comedy pliers, anyway). To be honest, you wouldn't expect anything less from a game that tackles the rather unlikely scenario of the Nazis using a mysterious alien energy to become the dominant force of the future. But given Irrational's previous take on the cliché-packed world of comic superheroes, the step from ice-powered Russian maniacs and time-controlling overlords to genetically enhanced legions of the Third Reich isn't as big as you might think.

On the surface, *FFvT3R* (the official abbreviation, according to the game's website) is a direct continuation of the original *Freedom Force*; indeed, the intro picks up exactly where the last game left off and offers an opening training mission that combines a story recap and brisk walk through the basics in one neat bundle.

Things also haven't changed much in terms of controlling your heroes and setting them on the evil minions you meet along the way. *FFvT3R* keeps the gameplay on the RTS side of the fence rather than venturing into a more action-led system, with players able to pause the action at any time and give very specific instructions to each of their heroes through a simple menu selection on the right mouse button. Surveying the terrain ahead is also often possible, although the fact that enemies and obstacles don't make their presence felt until one of your team actually 'sees' them makes scouting ahead with the faster or airborne heroes a priority in most cases.

To say that the opening few missions (depicting the return of one villain from the last game, the kidnapping of another by said returning villain, and a plan to destroy the world) don't even begin to scratch the surface is somewhat of an understatement, and it's only once Blitzkrieg raises his Hitler-esque head that the game really opens up with its wider selection of heroes to recruit and train. Balancing out your team with the right selection of skills is obviously where much of the strategy lies, as often you'll need more than just brute strength to get through successfully – high-up objectives, for instance, require flyers while other missions will call for specific abilities such as mind control or tunnelling.

> "EVERYTHING ABOUT FREEDOM FORCE IS A CLICHÉ, BUT THAT'S A BONUS RATHER THAN A PROBLEM"

Of course, those who played the original *Freedom Force* will know that all this is nothing new and, admittedly, the preview code we've played indicates that the structure and gameplay don't bring much new material to the table. Instead, Irrational has concentrated on enhancing the visual side of the game through the new game engine that allows the various destructive effects to be played out in a far more impressive manner – buildings crumble and leave behind ruins, for example.

The developer has also added a "vastly improved multiplayer including several completely new modes" that, as we write, is still under wraps. While fans will no doubt be salivating over this prospect, we're more concerned with whether the game corrects any of the original's issues: as well as being decidedly short-lived, a lack of AI intelligence on both sides left a little to be desired. Although the preview code doesn't appear to suffer any such problems, only the finished product will shelve our suspicions.

WE WANT YOU, WE WANT YOU…

Thanks to many of the Freedom Force taking leave at the end of the last game, your initial team (consisting of only four heroes) is somewhat lacking when *The 3rd Reich* begins. As you advance, though, more familiar faces will return to action and join up – previous favourites such as The Ant, Eve and Liberty Lad will be automatically added to the team, allowing you to expand the range of your selection. However, there's also the option to recruit from outside your ranks and bring new heroes into the fray (so long as you've got enough Prestige Points to afford their services, that is). Irrational has added at least six original characters for the sequel, but fans of the first game won't be disappointed either.

FIFA STREET

"BIG UP YOUR CHEST, MAN, YOU NUTZED 'IM"



The Gamebreaker move in effect. It's like a normal kick but with a fancy cut-scene.

PS2 ***FIFA Street* is the funniest game we've ever played.** It instantly drew large crowds, but not for the four-on-four urban football action – these people came to wonder at the stunningly foolish commentary offered by MC Harvey of So Solid Crew. Presumably EA believes a recognisable chav icon is essential in capturing, and getting into the mindset of, the game's intended customers.

MC Harvey's lyrical diarrhoea spans three key areas: throwaway gibberish about such things as the goalie's "massive hands", out-of-place rap attacks, and uncharacteristically serious – yet still retarded – commentary on aspects of gameplay that may or may not be taking place on screen at the time. In all, Harvey comes across as an entirely unrelenting simpleton, who by being included in this game is purveying the message that talking in this stunted, idiotic manner is an acceptable way to behave.

The football is also quite funny, if a little depressing when you decide to try to advance through the game. Everything's incredibly vague and unrealistic. The ball doesn't act as though it's an independent object, with its movement resembling one of those ball-on-elastic things favoured by parents with clumsy children and small gardens. Players perform a variety of unnecessary flips and somersaults in order to pass or shoot, and the combination of these extravagant animations and the simple game mechanics results in things rarely seeming to connect properly.

"MC HARVEY COMES ACROSS AS AN ENTIRELY UNRELENTING SIMPLETON"

FIFA Street leaves you with an emptiness that comes from playing something you don't really feel you're controlling. You have tricks to pull off, and a special Gamebreaker kick to unleash once you've built up your combo meter, but these additions fail to change what is a dull, simple and quite lazy attempt at a fast-paced four-a-side football game.

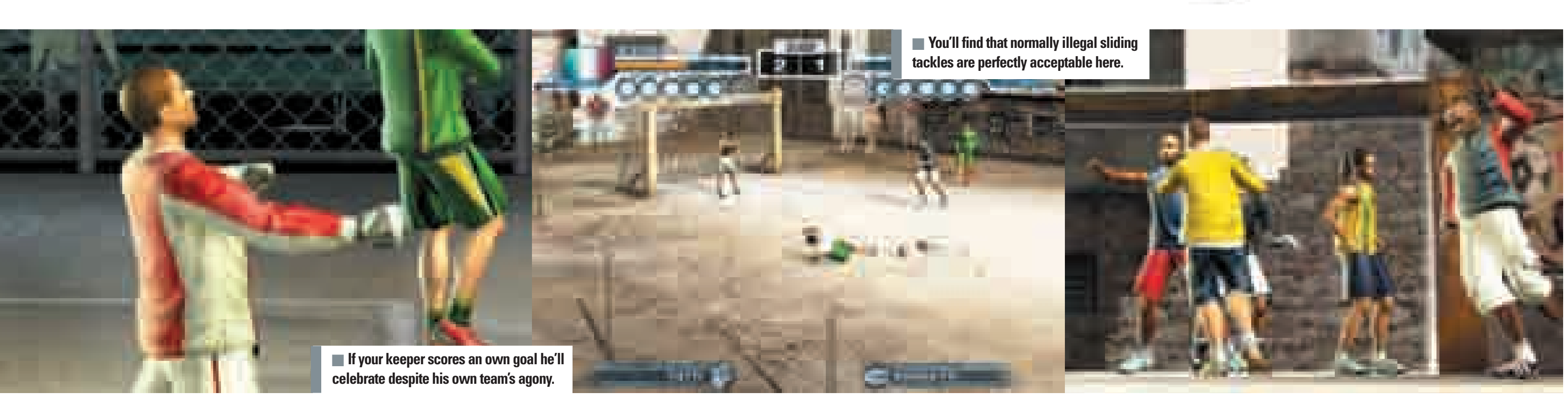
This is an incredibly dumb and unappealing game in its current state, offering nothing that hasn't already been done better. Hopefully, in the weeks before *FIFA Street*'s release EA will change the game entirely, removing MC Harvey in the process and putting the whole horrible experience down to some kind of well-intentioned, yet ill-advised, experiment. Unlikely though.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, Cube, PC
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: EA Sports Big
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: March '05
GENRE: Sport
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

Urban four-a-side football with gratuitous wittering.



If your keeper scores an own goal he'll celebrate despite his own team's agony.

You'll find that normally illegal sliding tackles are perfectly acceptable here.


eMag

F.E.A.R.

SO SCARY EVEN THE DEVELOPER DOESN'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT

We're all for suspense, surprise and intrigue – they're the main part of any nutritious horror diet – but it's hard to know what to say about something like *F.E.A.R.* when the developer is being as mysterious as the game itself. That's what stands in the way of us telling you all you could ever want to know about the game. One interview with one of Monolith's top guys later and we've heard the phrase 'I can't talk about that' enough times to fill a mountain of non-disclosure agreements. But considering that's always been the Monolith way, we're not surprised; from the original *No One Lives Forever* through to the still-to-be-released *Matrix Online*, talking plot points with the developer is like trying to get blood out of a stone.

That's a fairly bad analogy in the case of *F.E.A.R.* because if there's one thing the game isn't short of, it's blood. This is, of course, due to the supernatural horror that Monolith has sprinkled over the action-flavour flakes of gameplay. Influenced by *Ringu*, *Dark Water*, *The Grudge* and many other Asian horror movies, the game's use of suggestion and shadow over the *Doom*-style creature feature is a plus point when it comes to atmosphere. However, what has become clear having experienced what *F.E.A.R.* has to offer is that this decidedly creepy nature (featuring little girls with a mind for carnage and goggle-eyed creatures that can disappear in a second) is merely a plot concept that takes second place to the rest of the gameplay.

"The game's core is action – that's the main concept we started with, to create an action movie in a first-person shooter," admits Kevin Stephens, Monolith's director of technology. "Just as the Sixties spy is the twist to the concept in *No One Lives Forever*, the supernatural edge is the twist that has led us to *F.E.A.R.* It also comes back to, as a gamer, what's most important to you. For me, I'm always tied up with the gameplay, so the action is always going to be key. The supernatural side comes into the story, so if you're really into plot and character development then you're probably going to be more interested in the supernatural aspect of it."

While this admission is patently obvious once you play through some of *F.E.A.R.* (much of the horror is kept to cut-scenes or set-pieces where there's nothing else to distract you), it does put a damper on our anticipation for the game – we've been hoping for something to break the FPS mould for some time and the idea that *F.E.A.R.*'s biggest selling point might only be a veneer on what is essentially rather obvious blasting is a little disheartening.

That's not to say that the gung-ho action isn't satisfying, however. It is, thanks to the completely new technology engine that features all manner of destructible environments, explosion effects and Havoc physics, and the game's use of slow-motion action à la *Max Payne* (which does actually fit into the story, despite Stephens' admission that "it's not a perfect marriage, because it was always intended to enhance the gameplay first").

We're just a little worried that in a market where the FPS is king, you need something more than frantic action to make your mark. *F.E.A.R.* looks great and plays well, so hopefully the story that's being kept oh-so-secret will be the deal-breaker. If not, there might not be that much to be afraid of after all.

"F.E.A.R. MAY HAVE A SUPERNATURAL EDGE, BUT THE GAMEPLAY IS ABOUT ALL-OUT ACTION RATHER THAN MAKING YOU JUMP"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal
DEVELOPER: Monolith
RELEASE: June '05
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1 (Multiplayer TBA)

CONCEPT

Monolith continues to ride the 'action movie in an FPS' train, favouring scary thrills and gore over *No One Lives Forever*'s super-spies or *TRON*'s computers.

DOWN LOW – TOO SLOW

In a move that bolsters Monolith's claims of 'action first, suspense second', the multiplayer side of *F.E.A.R.* casts aside the main game's supernatural aspect to concentrate on fast-paced gunplay. In fact, the only element linking the two is the slow-mo function. While only the lead character in the single-player mode can take advantage of it, the multiplayer game makes players fight for control of a device that allows you to make everyone else move slowly while you run around slaughtering them. It works to a degree, but isn't enough on its own to make what's there feel anything special over the competition.



The characterisations in *F.E.A.R.* are suitably gung-ho – there's no subtlety here.



ENGINEER PROFILE

Having joined in 1997, Kevin Stephens is one of Monolith's most senior engineers – as director of technology, he is responsible for overseeing the engineering on all Monolith titles. Stephens has also contributed to numerous Monolith titles, including leading engineering teams on *Shogo: Mobile Armor Division* and *No One Lives Forever*.

HISTORY

- **NO ONE LIVES FOREVER** 2000 [PC]
- **SHOGO: M.A.D.** 1998 [PC]
- **CLAW** 1997 [PC]

Many of the weapon fire effects are as pretty as you could hope for.

Long-distance sniping – the coward's approach to killing.

"NINETY FIVE PER CENT OF BEING AFRAID IS ABOUT YOUR IMAGINATION, SO HINTING AT THINGS IS A REALLY GOOD TECHNIQUE"
KEVIN STEPHENS, DIRECTOR OF TECHNOLOGY, MONOLITH PRODUCTIONS

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THIS AIN'T NO TIME TO BE SCARED, SON

JERRY BRUCKHEIMER + ASIAN HORROR + BULLET TIME = F.E.A.R.

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 2



■ This plays just as well as the first game, though the camera does seem to be a little more erratic.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, Cube
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: 11 March '05
GENRE: Sport
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

■ Take a boxer of your choice and attempt to earn the all the titles a boxing legend could ever wish for – again.

A SEQUEL WITH A NICE RING TO IT

A good boxing game is hard to find. For all the *Super Punch Out*s and *Ready To Rumbles*, if you want a few rounds that don't rely on combo bars and special moves then you have very few quality options. When *Fight Night* arrived it showed us exactly how good a real boxing game could be.

The innovative control method allowed for great guidance of your punches and EA would be foolish to mess with this formula too much, so for the sequel it seems to have opted to add elements and tweak the gameplay in the smallest of ways. Slightly crisper graphics and the addition of devastating Haymaker punches ensure that this doesn't fall short of its predecessor.

As is now nigh-on standard in sports games, you'll be able to create your own boxer from scratch as well as having the pick of some of the world's finest fighters. However, the ability to create a perfect replica of yourself will be hindered by the fact that most of us aren't built as a boxer should be and would get a severe mauling should we find ourselves in a ring. With this in mind, we found it a good idea to add a good few pounds of muscle to our inadequate frames when creating our man.

Another of the new features that this second instalment will contain is the chance to play your own cutman. After each round you'll be treated to a close-up view of your battered, bruised and generally broken face and you'll have a set amount of time to treat certain wounds with coolant and swabs. This will take the form of a short mini-game where not only will you have to use your judgement to prioritise the injuries, but also keep a marker inside a moving bar to speed the recovery. It's a tactical area of gameplay that will pretty much ruin your chances if you mess it up too often, as a mug that resembles a dropped pie is likely to get you pulled from the fight.

From our first look at the game, things seem promising and the new features should add to the winning formula that made the first title such a success rather than overcomplicating things. We'll give *Fight Night Round 2* a good run when we get the finished code.

"CRISPER GRAPHICS AND THE ADDITION OF HAYMAKER PUNCHES ENSURE THIS DOESN'T FALL SHORT OF ITS PREDECESSOR"



■ Between each round you'll now get the chance to heal your battered face.

■ Create your own boxer – it seems more real when it's your own face taking the beating.


eMag

CONFLICT: GLOBAL TERROR



Quick, shoot the guy on the left. He'll fall down the stairs and look really funny.

"WE ARE CONSCIOUS OF KEEPING FANS OF THE PREVIOUS GAMES HAPPY WHILE AT THE SAME TIME ATTRACTING A NEW AUDIENCE TO THE CONFLICT BRAND"

RAY LIVINGSTONE, PRODUCT MANAGER, SCI

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

KEEP ON ROCKIN' IN THE FREE WORLD

CONFLICT: DESERT STORM - SAND + "WAR ON TERROR" = CONFLICT: GLOBAL TERROR

CONFLICT: GLOBAL TERROR

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT

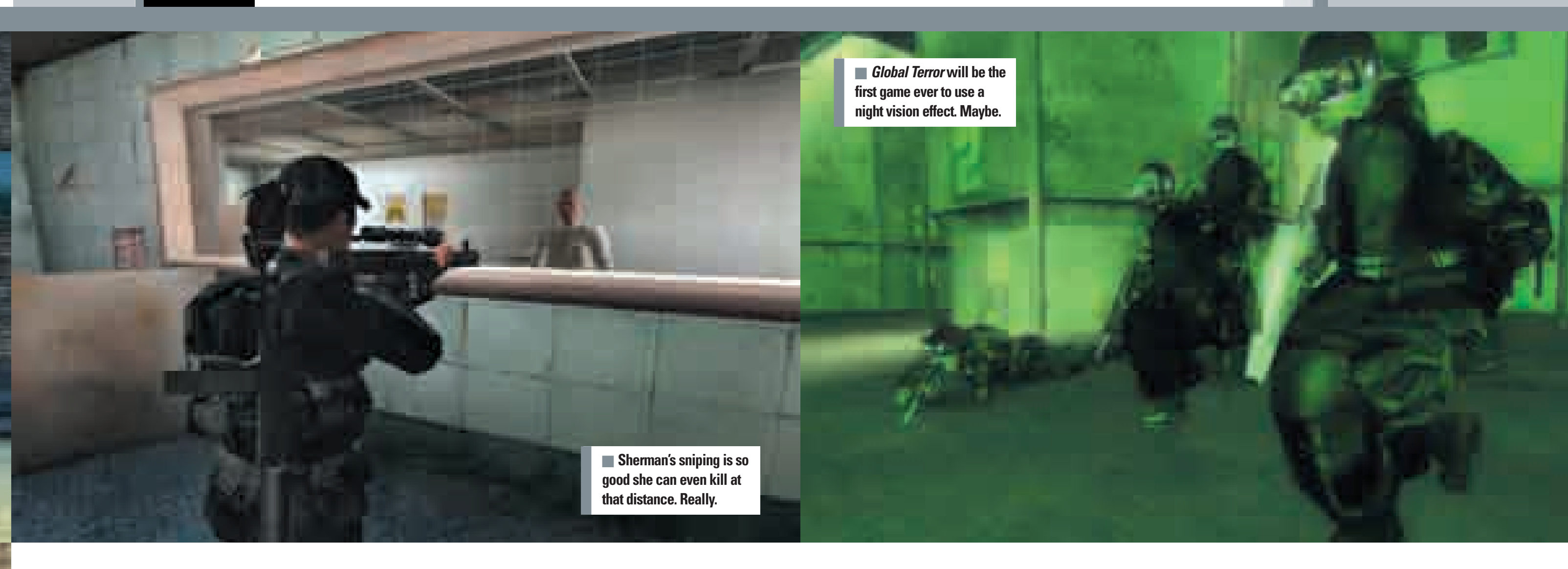


DEVELOPER PROFILE

Based in Bath, Pivotal Games was established nearly five years ago and has already put out four number-one games under the watchful eye of SCi. Admittedly one of those was *Conflict: Vietnam* but hey, when DJ Otzi gets to number one, it still counts.

HISTORY

- CONFLICT: VIETNAM 2004 [Multi]
- THE GREAT ESCAPE 2003 [Multi]
- CONFLICT: DESERT STORM 2002 [Multi]



Global Terror will be the first game ever to use a night vision effect. Maybe.

Sherman's sniping is so good she can even kill at that distance. Really.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: SCi
DEVELOPER: Pivotal Games
RELEASE: Sept '05
GENRE: Shoot-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

Moving away from the Middle East and Vietnam settings, the hit-and-miss *Conflict* series has a crack at urban warfare in this squad-based shooter.

COMIN' AGAIN TO SAVE THE MOTHERF**KING DAY, YEAH!

PS2 **This time last year, we loved the *Conflict* series – as in *really* loved it.** Four-player co-op mode, tearing around villages in Jeeps as your team-mates mow down any and all wrongdoers to the warming strains of Bonnie Tyler's *Total Eclipse Of The Heart* – absolute gaming gold. Imagine our dismay, then, when we first got our hands on the atrocity that was *Vietnam*. A mess of bamboo corridors, pitiful AI and a definite absence of anything resembling 'fun', the third *Conflict* game came worryingly close to undoing our faith in the franchise altogether. But thankfully, all is not lost. Having left it just long enough for us to forgive those involved for *Vietnam*, we're now being treated to *Conflict* on a truly global scale.

Already, things are shaping up in such a way that we're relatively confident that the wrongs of last year won't be repeated.

Areas have been opened up substantially to ensure that the tactical commands have the impact and potential they should, and in addition to the usual array of orders you'll have even more control over your squad. Delayed instructions, multiple commands and more options overall bring the game closer still to the likes of *Hidden & Dangerous* or the early *Rainbow Six* titles.

Additional freedom is also granted by your quartet's new-found scampering abilities, letting them leap over small barriers in order to explore even more of the maps, but given how little we've seen there's always a danger that invisible boundaries and slightly higher walls could cause frustration aplenty. Fingers crossed, though, all will be shipshape and generally awesome by September.

Otherwise, it's just a case of Pivotal addressing the more minor complaints people have levelled at the series. Switching to a character now sees the camera pan around them quickly for a brief local overview, for instance, and tweaks to the team line-up see the original members return with new lady sniper Sherman joining the fray. Gone is the levelling up of skills, too – the complaint that supposedly 'trained' soldiers couldn't hit the broad side of a really broad thing has clearly been acted upon – and each team member has a distinct weapons specialisation to help you get through the game in four pieces.

The final medal to grace *Global Terror*'s shiny new uniform should be the online mode. Details are scant at the time of going to press other than the fact that the team is looking to support network functionality (the intention was there even before the release of *Desert Storm 2*) and that logic suggests that it'll most likely be an extension of the game's co-operative features. There's always scope for team based games in the vein of *SOCOM* too, but any and all information is pure speculation at this stage.

"THE FACT YOUR MEN COULDN'T HIT THE BROAD SIDE OF A BROAD THING HAS BEEN ACTED UPON"

Thinking back to what made the first two games so great, *Global Terror* falls far closer to these than to the weaker links in both series and genre. But with rock-solid games like *Rainbow Six* and, to a lesser extent, *Ghost Recon* taking squad-based warfare firmly by the horns, Pivotal can't miss a trick if it wants the *Conflict* name to be restored to its former glory.

Basically, we want this to be great – as in *really* great – but we've been stung before and setting our expectations too high is often a one-way ticket to Disappointment Central. With a seat next to a really boring man who won't shut up. And it's a long journey. Still, it can't be any worse than *Conflict: Vietnam*, right?

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

Everyone loves ragdoll physics. Just where would the likes of *Max Payne 2*, *Half-Life 2* and *Psi-Ops* be without the realistic movement of items and people within their game worlds? Stuck in the 20th Century, that's where. There can be little disputing the fact that physics will play an even greater role moving towards the next generation and a well-implemented engine can make for some sickly satisfying situations. *Global Terror* is the latest in a crazy long line of titles to use ragdoll, and as in the games mentioned earlier it really does bring a smile to your face to see a naughty terrorist fall several floors after being shot only to be tossed away like a paper bag on the breeze by a secondary explosion. We're sick like that.


eMag

SWAT 4



You will get to use your gun but not very often, so ease off the trigger.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal
DEVELOPER: Irrational Games
RELEASE: March '05
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1 (1-16 Online)

CONCEPT

Vivendi's long-running series continues to deviate from the usual FPS fare by making killing people A Bad Thing.

THE THINKING MAN'S BREED OF FPS

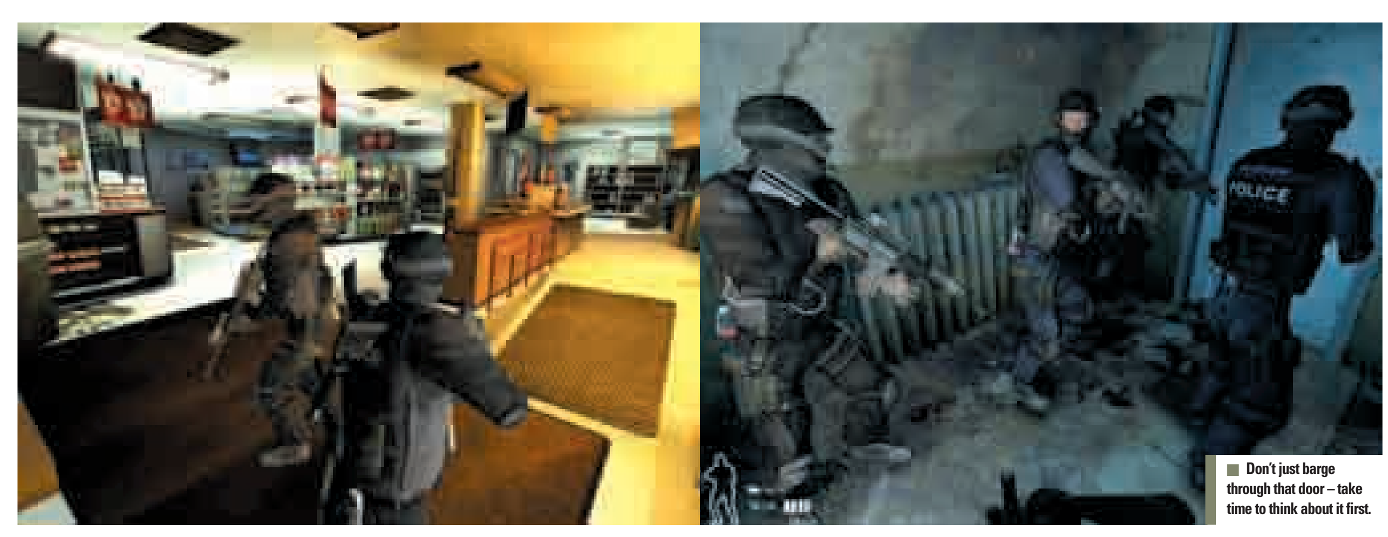
Like your first-person shooters fast, frantic and full of ragdoll corpses falling down stairs? Then *SWAT 4* isn't for you. In a world of squad-based shooters full of terrorist gangs, world travel and firefights, Vivendi's long-running series has always been more subtle thanks to its focus on subduing your targets rather than slaughtering them. However, a variety of problems (not least the cumbersome controls and incredibly slow pace) have held the series back, and it's these that Irrational Games is attempting to address in this fourth instalment.

As FPS games go, *SWAT 4* is still among the slowest, but this is primarily to do with the subject matter, with the use of genuine SWAT members as advisors teaching Irrational that real-life police raids are all about timing and patience rather than rushing in and spraying hot lead everywhere. To this end, *SWAT 4* is as realistic as you could hope for; each of the 14 single-player scenarios (all of which are playable with up to five people co-operatively) offer nerve-rackingly believable situations such as drug raids, sieges and hostage stand-offs that require plenty of planning and control of your two SWAT squads if you want to succeed.

Thankfully, this is one area that Irrational really has improved. Whereas previous games in the series have had players floundering over giving orders to their men, *SWAT 4*'s simplified controls (using a context-sensitive cursor that changes depending on where you point it as well as a handy menu featuring all the orders) help the player greatly. The inclusion of a Quick Mission Maker, granting access to the game's entire catalogue of weapons, suspects and areas, also allows for the creation of unique levels that can then be uploaded to the internet for communal use; a handy function from a game requiring as much strategy as action.

From the virtually complete code we've played, it's clear that *SWAT 4* demands a different level of skill from anyone who plays it – a slow and steady approach not seen in most FPS titles today. Sadly, the fact that the multiplayer mode features the same lack of speed, and the wardrobe selection makes it hard to see who's on your side, is giving us cause for concern. However, so long as Vivendi pushes the benefits of the single-player over everything else, *SWAT 4* should get some recognition at retail.

"SWAT 4'S SLOWER PACE MEANS THOSE WITH ITCHY TRIGGER FINGERS PROBABLY WON'T APPRECIATE WHAT'S GOING ON"



Don't just barge through that door – take time to think about it first.

DEAD TO RIGHTS II

IT'S JUST ONE MAN AND HIS DOG

PS2 ***Dead To Rights II* is a game that's appeared on our radar a couple of times now, only to disappear again once we started to take an interest in what was being offered.** Part of the reason for this is the fact that – in a sensible move – Namco has decided to abandon the previously reported Christmas 2004 release and has opted for a less *Halo 2*/*San Andreas*-filled time of year, namely this spring.

Our hero, Jack Slate, only just survived his last adventure in Grant City so you'd think it would take something pretty important to drag him back into the crime-fighting business. As it goes, it's the plight of a young girl that will lure him into peril this time and it's only after he's secured her safety that he finds out that the story goes much deeper than he thought. Always the way, eh?

Loneliness is a terrible thing and it's never nice to have to take on an entire crime wave all by yourself, so once again Jack has decided to let his loyal pet tag along to help him out. If we had to pick one element from the first *Dead To Rights* game that we would have liked to have seen improved it would be Shadow's canine abilities, so it pleased us greatly to find out that Jack's dog will be returning and – being a young dog – he'll have learnt a few new tricks. During play he can be ordered to scamper off, leap upon any nearby enemy and disarm them for you. The fact that the little fella is invincible will make him a valuable tool in your fight against crime and with Shadow at your side you'll have to master a whole new element of gameplay so that when you come across some of the larger mobs of villains you can use him effectively.

"WITH SHADOW AT YOUR SIDE YOU'LL HAVE TO MASTER A WHOLE NEW ELEMENT OF GAMEPLAY"

Obviously, the canine will have his limits and you won't be able to send him in to do all the dirty work – you'll have to deal with bosses and tougher enemies yourself, and his abilities will be directly tied to your stamina level. If your bar is looking full and flourishing then Shadow will tear around the screen acting like a smart bomb; however, if it's a little the worse for wear then he'll only be able to muster a small distraction, which should give you enough time to hit enemies from behind or find some decent cover.

Shadow isn't the only one who's spent some time honing his abilities, though. Jack himself seems to have been on a vigorous training schedule since the last game and has managed to acquire a fair amount of new techniques himself. While playing *Dead To Rights* the most frequently used moves were the disarms; it was always amusing to remove an enemy's weapon in one of 13 wincingly painful ways, so many will be pleased to hear that Namco has not only doubled the number of these moves but also plans to make them even nastier and quicker to pull off.

It seems the feeling of action is what has been the focus here and Namco has tried to improve the speed and variation of attacks over those of the first game (which, to be fair, didn't really suffer any problems to begin with), and this may just be enough to make it stand out when placed among the many third-person action titles out there.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Namco
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: April '05
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

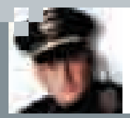
Take on the criminals of Grant City once again by using bullet time, various weapons and, of course, your dog, Shadow.

JUMP AROUND

One of the largest differences between *Dead To Rights II* and the first game is Jack's ability to actually leave the ground. Whereas the original was very flat, this game sees our man being able to climb ladders to access different levels and leap over almost any objects he comes across. The areas you have to work within will not only be more apt arenas for making use of your bullet-time abilities and taking on gangs of thugs, but will lend themselves to exploration and create multiple routes though the levels. Most importantly, this will help eliminate that old gamer's gripe of everyday object like boxes and bins blocking otherwise useable paths. Grown men dying due to being unable to clamber over a paper bag? Ridiculous.



Bullet time will play a major part in killing most groups of enemies – *The Matrix* has a lot to answer for.



POLICEMAN PROFILE

Playing as a cop or ex-cop in a videogame is an idea that's been used many times over. It's never a regular cop, though – always a rebel who doesn't mind breaking a few laws himself. Let's face it, directing traffic just wouldn't be fun.

HISTORY

- **DYNAMITE COP** 1999 [Dreamcast]
- **FUTURE COP LAPD** 1998 [PSone]
- **VIRTUA COP 2** 1996 [Multi]

Dead To Rights II will feature fast gameplay and even faster women. Hurrah.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

DOG DAY AFTERNOON

DEAD TO RIGHTS + BRUTALITY x BETTER DOG = DEAD TO RIGHTS II

"THE LIGHTNING-FAST MELEE FIGHTING SYSTEM ALLOWS JACK TO COLLECT MELEE WEAPONS THROUGHOUT HIS ENVIRONMENT"

NAMCO PRESS RELEASE

You'd think Jack would learn that Grant City isn't a pleasant place to live.

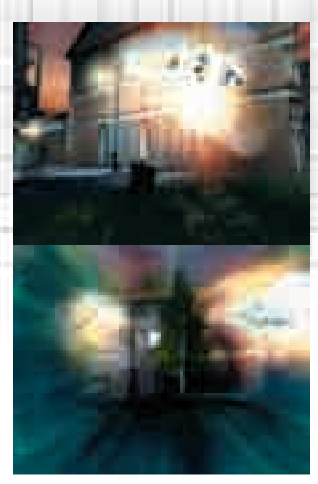
SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

TIMESHIFT

LET'S DO THE TIME WARP AGAIN

Format: Xbox, PC
Origin: US
Publisher: Atari
Developer: Saber Interactive
Genre: FPS
Players: 1 (Multiplayer TBA)



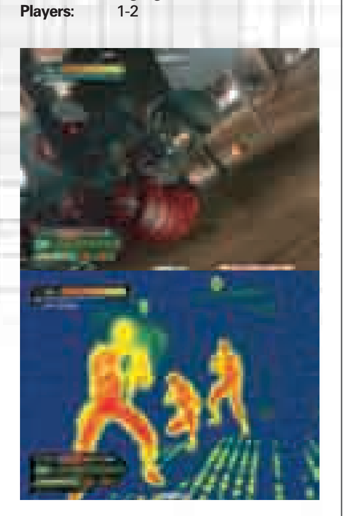
It seems that every FPS developer has discovered the joys of slowing down time – first there was *Project: Snowblind*, then *F.E.A.R.* and now Atari's *TimeShift* has leapt into the fray. The difference here (and, of course, there has to be a difference) is that *TimeShift* offers players an almost *Blinx*-like control over time; not only can it be slowed down, but it can also be stopped or rewound to a specific point. Atari insists that such skills are pivotal to the gameplay – specifically overcoming obstacles, solving puzzles and wading through hordes of enemies – and aren't just a neat gameplay mechanic. In any case, it certainly looks pretty enough. We just hope there's enough gameplay to match.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '05

GHOST SQUAD

WHO YA GONNA CALL?

Format: Arcade
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Sega Amusements
Developer: In-House
Genre: Lightgun
Players: 1-2



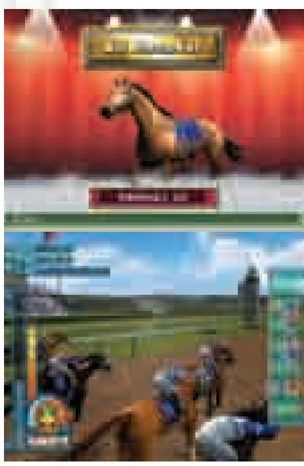
Trust Sega to innovate the arcade lightgun genre and come up with the ultimate hybrid – *Rainbow Virtua Cop Six*, or *Ghost Squad* as it's commonly known. Taking a more anti-terrorist direction than previous shooters (although the on-rails movement negates the possibility of stealth), players undertake three missions using a newly designed gun that can be switched between single shot, three-shot burst or fully automatic at the press of a button. Different techniques and events (including bomb disposal, code breaking, hand-to-hand combat and various vision modes) add the *R6* flavour, while Sega's Integrated Circuit card technology means players can save data or influence the action by earning points.

RELEASE DATE: Q1 '05

GALLOP RACER 2

'HEE-YA, MULE… HEE-YA!'

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Zoo Digital
Developer: Tecmo
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-4



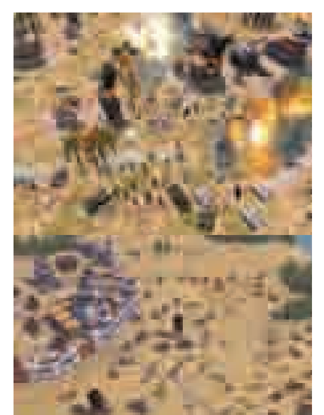
Horse racing – hardly the most obvious choice for a videogame but, as Sega's *Derby Owners Club* has proved, one that can work if done properly. If the complexities of Koei's *G1 Jockey* series are too much for you, though, there's always *Gallop Racer 2*, a rather more arcade-style take on the idea with a smattering of RPG elements to keep the more dedicated jockeys happy. Think the *Gran Turismo* of horse-racing titles and, well, you're almost close – over 4,000 horses, 42 different tracks, customisable jockeys that acquire new skills as you use them and even the ability to have up to four players competing against one another. And not even a glimpse of John McCririck, thank the Lord.

RELEASE DATE: 12 MARCH

EMPIRE EARTH II

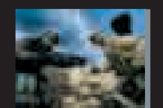
THE SOUTH SHALL RISE AGAIN

Format: PC
Origin: US
Publisher: Vivendi Universal
Developer: Mad Doc Software
Genre: RTS
Players: 1 (Multiplayer TBA)



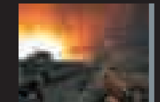
The real-time strategy genre is one of those that you either love or hate – like Marmite, there's no happy medium. Even so, there are many games that claim to break down the barriers and make the genre more accessible, Vivendi's *Empire Earth II* being yet another of them. Strangely though, *Empire Earth II* actually does a fairly good job of it. Thanks to a hugely simplified control and menu method that takes much of the sting out of micro-managing your men, buildings and resources, you can spend much of your time taking over territories and building your empire which, in any good RTS, is what you want. It's a risk, certainly (hardcore fans might hate the simplicity), but you can't blame Vivendi for trying.

RELEASE DATE: MAY '05



Delayed – Battlefield 2 [PC]

■ If you're eager to get back into those army fatigues, you'll have to wait – EA has slipped *Battlefield 2* back from March to an undisclosed date later in the spring.



Delayed – Dogs Of War [Multi]

■ Another EA slippage, although one that we're hoping might make a difference given the state of the last *Medal Of Honor* game. Expect to see *Dogs Of War* in late June.

YU-GI-OH!: NIGHTMARE TROUBADOUR

DUAL-SCREEN DUELLING

Format: Nintendo DS
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House
Genre: Strategy
Players: 1-2



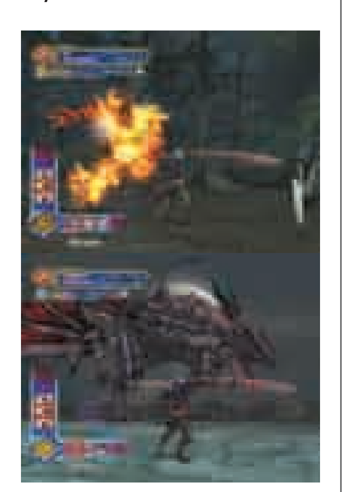
Hey, so we're suckers for a good card-based strategy game – it could be worse. The return of the *Yu-Gi-Oh!* series on a Nintendo handheld is hardly unexpected but what does come as a pleasant treat is how Konami has adapted the game (so far unchanged on the regular GBA) for the DS's capabilities. As such, we now have duels spread across two screens – a top-down view of the field on the bottom and a 3D angle on the top – along with the option to use the stylus to play out your strategy. And then there are the special visual effects for monster summoning, magic and traps cards and the like. It might not sound like much but if the gameplay remains solid it'll do for us.

RELEASE DATE: APRIL '05

CASTLEVANIA: CURSE OF DARKNESS

RETURN OF THE BAT

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House
Genre: Action/Adventure
Players: 1



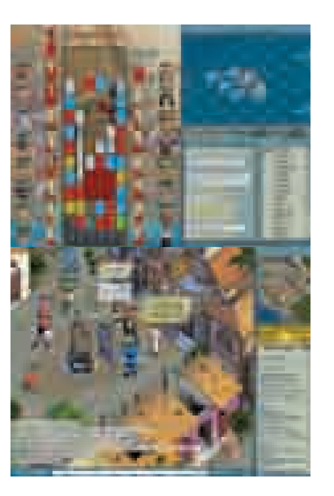
So… *Castlevania: Rogue Agent*? Not quite, although the change in perspective from vampire slayer to ex-demon isn't exactly a new idea. Still, where the last 3D *Castlevania* was at least a playable if slightly repetitive romp, we've got some hope for a bit of improvement with the sequel. Set in a cursed land and placing you as an ex-Devil Forgemaster, the tale of revenge and betrayal is exactly what you'd expect from a *Castlevania* title. Now, though, you can aquire allies (over 30 in total, all of whom can evolve their skills) that can be used to help you overcome obstacles, defeat enemies and unravel puzzles. Whether that'll help solve the previous game's issues is still unclear, but hopefully Konami will have taken the criticism to heart.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '05

YOHOHO! PUZZLE PIRATES

WELL, SHIVER ME JIGSAW

Format: PC/Mac
Origin: US
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Three Rings
Genre: MMORPG Puzzler
Players: Massively Multiplayer



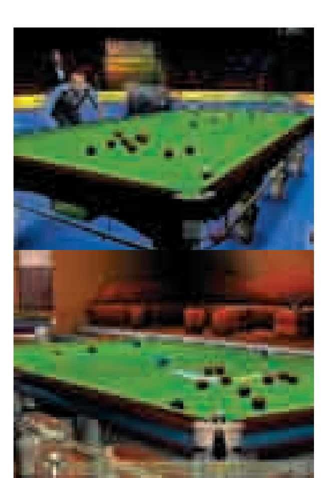
You might have noticed that we like pirates – aye, we do. Naturally then, the idea of a massively multiplayer RPG based on the concept of being a pirate appeals to us greatly… especially since there's a big twist in the tale. You see, while you do get to play the part of a pirate as he (or she) gradually works their way up from lowly shipmate to captain of their own crew, everything you have to do is played out through puzzles; sword fighting, bilge pumping, even beer drinking is a puzzle that you play against other people. To say it's all a bit lighthearted is somewhat of an understatement, but then that's what makes it such fun. The game's been downloadable for a while, but it's good to see Ubisoft taking on the retail duties for a proper release.

RELEASE DATE: APRIL '05 (US)

WORLD SNOOKER CHALLENGE

SCREW BACK FOR THE BLUE

Format: PlayStation Portable
Origin: UK
Publisher: Sega Europe
Developer: Blade Interactive
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-2

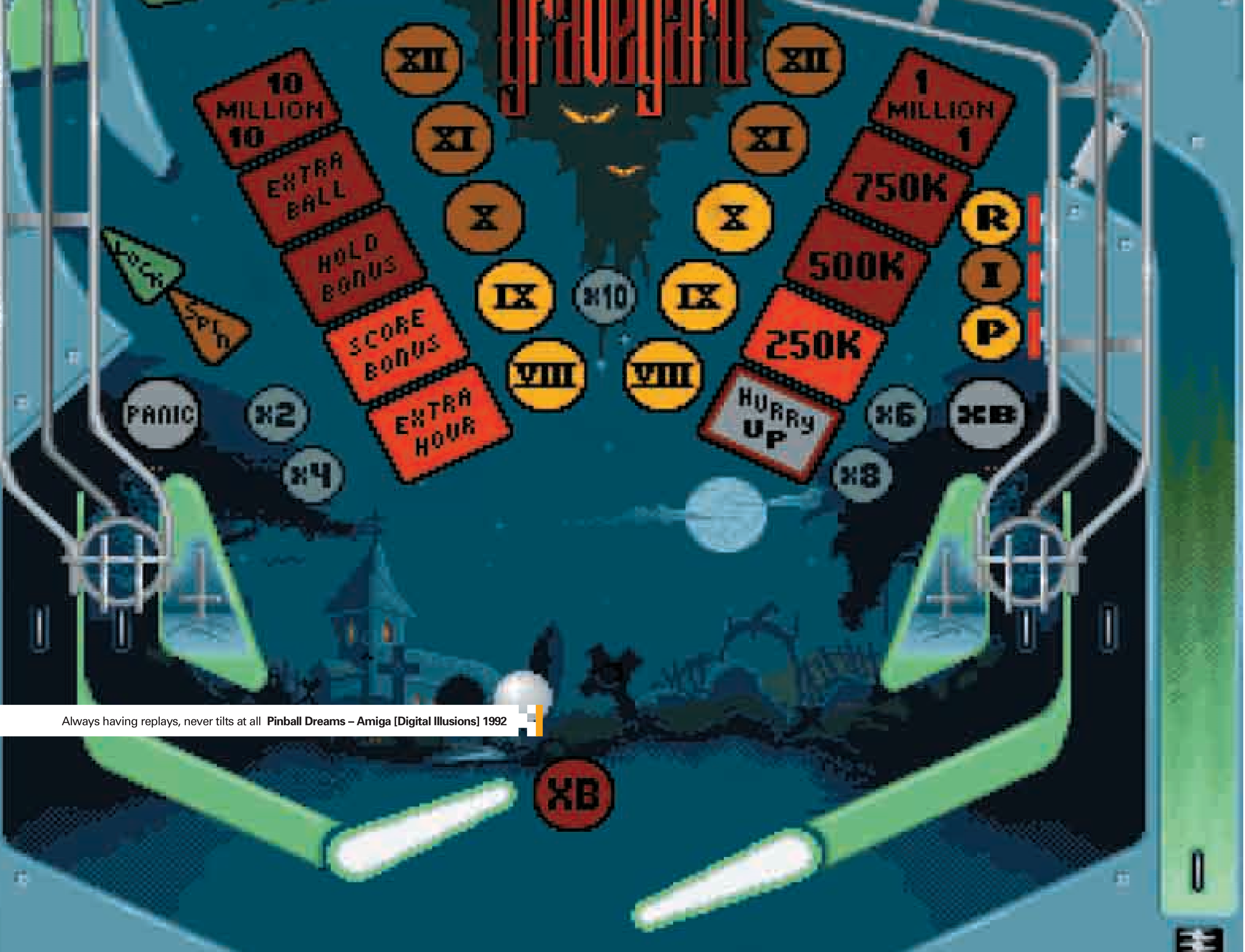


That Blade is busy bringing yet another pair of *World Snooker Championship* titles to the PS2 and Xbox is no great shock, but the thought of a PSP version that almost mirrors the PS2 one does sound intriguing. Going on what we've seen, the game is remarkably close to its bigger brother and offers the same selection of 96 world-ranked players, various game modes (including extras like billiards and American pool), as well as some polished visuals and physics. On top of that, there's the added attraction of the Challenge mode, where each of the top 32 ranked players set tasks that offer big rewards if completed – just the kind of thing you need for a quick burst of ball-on-baize action.

RELEASE DATE: MARCH '05



DIE
JACK
INIT
SUPER
XB
SB
DB
LOCK



Always having replays, never tilts at all **Pinball Dreams – Amiga [Digital Illusions] 1992**



ADVERTISING IN VIDEOGAMES IS NOTHING NEW – AND WE'RE ALL USED TO PRODUCT PLACEMENT THESE DAYS – BUT NOW IT LOOKS LIKE PROMOTIONAL PROGRAMMING IS BIG BUSINESS. GAMES™ FINDS OUT WHAT THE HARD SELL IS DOING TO OUR SOFTWARE…

SOFT SELL

There is a misconception that videogames are for pale-faced, spotty adolescents with the communication skills of a fish and an attention span only slightly greater. But games are big business, and the people who play them are now the most sought-after in the world. Advertising executives are falling over themselves for a piece of the action, with battles for attention as hard-fought as a *Halo 2* deathmatch.

This isn't surprising. The latest figures show the software market was worth £1.15 billion in the UK alone last year. But what has caught the imagination of advertisers is the realisation that 18- to 34-year-olds are spending hours playing games. This is the same audience ad agencies have been doing their best to pin down. They're finding it increasingly difficult to reach



this age group through the traditional methods of television, radio and the press, so when word got round that adults were picking up the likes of *The Getaway* and *Grand Theft Auto*, they grew to accept that the PlayStation2 and Xbox are well worth tapping into – especially when they also noticed the games cost up to £40 a time. This is a market flush with affluent buyers. Until this realisation, advertisers thought only children bothered with games, and that made life difficult for agencies keen to exploit this side of the industry.

Maryam Bazargan is a director at in-game advertising agency Symbiosis Media, and she's noticed a rapid expansion of advertising in games over the last few years. "When we set up more than two years ago, most brands and agencies we met with initially said 'we don't target kids; we don't need to advertise in games'," she says. "It took a bit of education for many to realise they have been spending most of their media budgets on television and other media, whereas their audience are spending more time playing games. These game players were not 12-year-old boys, these were affluent 20- and 30-somethings."

Product placement and in-game advertising is nothing new. As early as the Eighties, Marlboro billboards were displayed in Sega's arcade racing titles. *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge* on the 8- and 16-bit computers was licensed by the car giant, and racing games today include top vehicles from prestigious manufacturers. Football games have ads placed on perimeter hoardings, while Codemasters' *Fast Food*, a budget game in which celebrity egg Dizzy had to solve a series of puzzles, was at one stage going to be called *Happy Eater*, in a deal with the motorway restaurant chain.

The leader in the field of product placement, however, has always been the movie industry. The concept was born in 1955 when James Dean swept an Ace comb through his hair in *Rebel Without A Cause*. Since then, we've watched E.T. eat Reese's Pieces and Will Smith listen to his JVC stereo in *I, Robot*. Happy Gilmore loved Subway sandwiches and Starbucks has had its coffee drunk on thousands of big screens. Yet from the days of *Pong* in the Seventies, the videogames industry has risen to become a major cultural and economic force and it is this part of the media industry above all others which is currently capturing the imagination. Global companies from Sony Ericsson and DaimlerChrysler to Proctor & Gamble and McDonald's are now including in-game promotions in their advertising budgets.

One of the development firms at the forefront of this revolution is Electronic Arts; it's the world's largest game publisher and its advertising revenues are up 60 per cent – not surprising when Intel and



McDonald's paid a fortune to have their products in *The Sims Online*. Now if your character is hungry a Big Mac will fill them up. But if you feel peckish in EA's *Need For Speed Underground 2*, then Burger King is there to tempt you, along with Best Buy, Old Spice and Cingular Wireless. But it's not just EA that's doing deals: Quiksilver is involved with the *Tony Hawk* series, Jeep and Lucozade are tied up with *Tomb Raider*'s Lara Croft, and Sony Ericsson is integral to *Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow*.

Charlie Barrett, head of strategic sales and licensing at Ubisoft, thinks the rise of in-game advertising was inevitable. "Games are now much bigger than they were and are being treated as blockbusters with budgets to match," he says. "They have become a mass-market product with thousands of people buying them. In that sense, large companies such as McDonald's were always going to become interested in games as an advertising medium."

Research show that gamers remember 30 per cent of in-game advertisements in the short-term and 15 per cent after five months. More heartening for both the industry and advertisers is that an independent Harvard Business School study showed more than 90 per cent of core gamers didn't mind in-game advertising.

Barrett says steps are taken to ensure the situation stays that way, and that ads never become too intrusive. "We are very selective about who we work with," he says. "Advertising must never interfere with gameplay. This is not just about money, it's about building a gaming brand and at Ubisoft we would never want to compromise that. If Adidas wanted a soccer game with its branding everywhere, then it's more likely that game would be given away free rather than sold. We are gamers too and we know that hardcore gamers are astute people. If you upset one, you could find your game is in trouble."

Brand new

As an example of how attractive games can be to advertisers, you only need look at the fastest selling videogame of all time, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*. In the UK alone it shifted 677,000 copies in two days at a price tag of up to £40 and with an '18' certificate slapped on the box. How could an advertiser ignore unit sales, spending power and an age range like that?

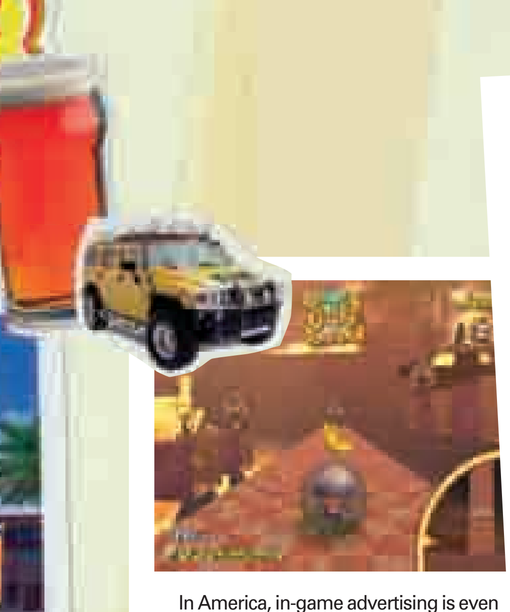
With difficulty, it appears, which is why Symbiosis Media is leading the way for advertising and product placement in Britain. It took a similar title to *GTA – The Getaway: Black Monday* – and signed a deal to feature advertising from Storm Watches and Carling. The placement of the two brands in Sony's highly anticipated sequel saw advertising integrated into the PS2 game, which features photorealistic replicas of the streets of London. Carling took most of the advertising space in the London Underground level of the game, which reflected the brewer's real-life presence in tube stations. Storm grabbed outdoor posters throughout the game and, as with Carling, used its tie-in to give away copies of *The Getaway* on its own website.

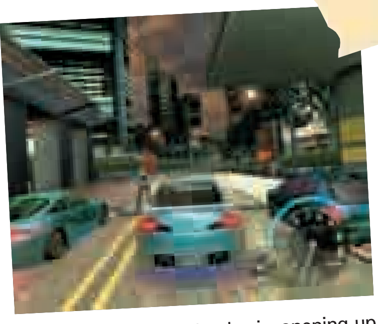
"Until recently, the majority of in-game advertising deals were promotionally led," explains Bazargan. "But in *The Getaway* the brands were included in the game for realism in return for some degree of marketing support for the game on the part of the brand. In general terms the advertising has had a natural fit with the gaming environment – for example, sports brands in sports titles and car brands in driving titles."

Bazargan also says Carling and Storm benefited from being in *The Getaway* since the laddish, gangster-style game is viewed as "cool" by the wider gaming audience.

Susan Flinders, global brand manager for Storm Watches, knows the choice of game was all-important. "Being in a cult Christmas game like *The Getaway* enabled us to target specific consumer types, reinforce Storm's fashionable brand image and get our brand in front of this target audience at a very specific time," she explains. "*The Getaway: Black Monday* targets the exact male age group we are marketing to both in the UK and overseas. Games aren't cheap, so presumably some of these gamers will have the money to spend on our watches."

It is Bazargan's belief that the current approach to in-game advertising mirrors the market in the early days of the internet when companies were cautious about committing their money. But she says the last year has seen a real growth in expectation as people play a single game for more than 40 hours (by contrast, people aged between 18 and 34 watch just as much television but switch between channels, not lingering for long).





In America, in-game advertising is even more advanced. Although television ads accounted for a $12 billion slice of commercial accounts, advertisers spent $16 million on videogame advertising last year and most of that went on product placement. Among those eager for a spot are fast-food firms, shoe companies, car manufacturers and breweries. Some of it will be simple. England skipper David Beckham could be wearing Adidas boots in a football game or Lara Croft could sport a logo from a top fashion house – she's already drinking Lucozade.

"Advertisers have seen the impact a game can have on their brand," explains Barrett. "Lara Croft turned Lucozade from an old man's health drink to a trendy, young person's energy drink. And while I feel the Lara brand is not as strong now as it once was because the gameplay has suffered in later titles, you can see why advertisers are increasingly interested and why that campaign was so successful."

While some gamers may frown on in-game advertising, Barrett insists that it's an integral part of a game's creative process. "We see advertising and product placement as important because it aids development," he says. "The next generation of games will cost millions and millions of pounds to produce. Advertising revenue will help to fund that and enable companies like Ubisoft to continue producing great, innovative titles. It can only be a positive thing."

Yet the biggest problem until now has been logistical. Games take a long time to develop, which is useless for advertising firms that may want to push out a late-breaking campaign. But across the Atlantic, American agency Massive Incorporated has devised the Massive Advertising Network, creating technology for games that connect to the internet. It will allow advertising to be sent down the phoneline to be positioned in certain areas of a game. Games signed up to the Massive Network will leave aside advertising space. This will then be filled by Massive on an on-going basis, opening up possibilities such as in-game billboards advertising *Ocean's Twelve* now and *Harry Potter* by the summer.

Nicholas Longano, chief marketing officer of Massive Incorporated, says the idea will generate millions of pounds in advertising revenue. He says 70 per cent of men between 18 and 34 spend more than five hours a week playing games, with some playing for up to two hours a night. These figures have been compiled by Nielsen Entertainment, the world's leading provider of media analysis. Massive and Nielsen signed a deal last year which they say gives advertisers the same level of detail, control and accountability they take for granted in more established media. "Not only are we seeing videogames claim a larger share of the entertainment wallet, but with today's captivating gameplay experiences we are seeing videogames occupy a larger share of leisure time activities as well," explains Michael Dowling, general manager of Nielsen Interactive Entertainment. "Games are fast developing into a real and powerful tool to reach this highly sought-after demographic of young people."

With this in mind, Massive has signed up Ubisoft, Atari and Vivendi among others. Massive believes that hard-coded product placement – ads that are permanently included in a game by the

THE DEATH OF TV

Just five years ago, it would have been unthinkable that advertisers could cut down on their television ad spend and look elsewhere to make an impact, but that's what's happening. As more channels go on air, the audience has fragmented and advertisers no longer know where to target their publicity. And a new TiVo-style device from Sky that lets people eliminate adverts could see a drastic loss of income for TV stations. According to Nicholas Longano of Massive Incorporated, ad agencies are being told to move some of the budget out of TV advertising and put it into games. Gaming is seen as a great alternative medium because it is a huge market, virtually untapped and growing fast. Gamers are perceived as loyal, sticking to titles they love, allowing advertisers to push their product each time the game is played. Gamers are also captive: once they start playing, they usually continue. Some analysts say gamers are bright and alert and so will subconsciously associate the product in a game with fun. Ubisoft's Charlie Barrett thinks in-game advertising will become 'the next big thing'. "Conglomerates are likely to look at alternative advertising vehicles," he says, "turning their attention to movies, television shows and, more importantly, to games."

SIX OF THE WORST

Some product placements are fine, some are a bit too in-your-face. For the past few years, gamespot.com has been dishing out the Most Despicable Product Placement award – these are a few of the recent, er, lucky winners…

DEVIL MAY CRY (PS2) CAPCOM

When you unlock Dante's extra outfit in this otherwise great game, you find you've unlocked a clothing ad.

DISNEY'S EXTREME SKATE ADVENTURE (MULTI) ACTIVISION

The player has to whizz around and collect ring tones. But the mobile phone being put together is an exact replica of a real-life phone, right down to the model number.

RL (MULTI) INTERPLAY

If you need energy at any point in this game, then there's only one drink to have and you can get it from vending machines everywhere.

CY GIRLS (PS2) INTERPLAY

Players can get clean through this action adventure by collecting loads of vacuum cleaner iRoombas advertised throughout the game.

FALLOUT: BROTHERHOOD OF STEEL (MULTI) INTERPLAY

Billboards and vending machines for a particular brand of energy drink abound in this game.

NEED FOR SPEED UNDERGROUND 2 (MULTI) EA

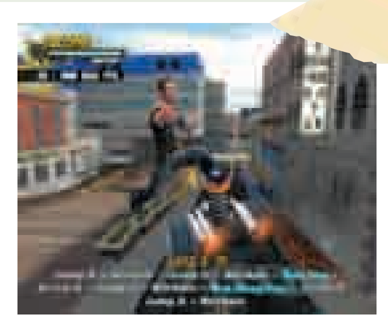
Pick up your Cingular Wireless telephone and drive your car to the secret parts shop – hidden next to Burger King. It's placement heaven… or hell, depending on your opinion.



> "Lara Croft turned Lucozade from an old man's health drink to a trendy, young person's energy drink"







programmer – will make way for its network of simultaneous advertising delivery.

"A few years ago, attracting in-game advertising was very limited," says Longano. "Advertisers spent $12 billion a year in the US targeting the 18-to-34-year-old male through television, which reached 99 per cent of the audience. Yet they only spent approximately $10 million in videogame ads, which reach over 70 per cent of the 18-to-34 audience, through product placement deals in 2003.

"We have always felt that product placement is a niche way of advertising… Basically, there has been no way to aggregate the audience across game titles to deliver a large audience, no ability to start and stop campaigns with precision. Massive's dynamic network has changed that completely. For the first time, advertisers can broadcast real-time advertising simultaneously across multiple videogaming platforms."

The price is right?

So with multinationals now willing to pump money into certain titles, will this subsidise cheaper games for the consumer? The jury is out. Barrett and a host of other developers say price reductions are unlikely. They are backed by Josh Graff, managing director of London-based Jam International, an in-game advertising agency, who says: "The money from advertising can be routed into research and development of the new titles and to experiment with new genres." Bazargan agrees, pointing out that, "Publishers will need to spend more on marketing their products to see a return on the development costs, which makes it unlikely that we will see any immediate drop in pricing." But even if cheaper games aren't on the horizon, most observers agree that luring in the ad men will firmly establish videogames alongside TV, film and music as a mass-media product, destroying the myth that gaming is for geeks or for a niche market of men.

"I think we're going to see gaming being integral to the whole media industry," says Barrett. "You only have to look at *Grand Theft Auto* with its great soundtrack. I can see a point where games break bands and singers on the music scene and where games cross-promote films."

It also looks likely that some non-commercial games will be created with the sole aim of selling a product and given away free. Companies such as Blockdot and WildTangent are already snapping up dozens of firms, creating 'advergames' for them in a bid to catch fresh punters. Instead of merely watching a trailer for the film *Sky Captain And The World Of Tomorrow* or spotting a poster or newspaper ad, people are being encouraged to 'buy into' the brand in a more interactive way. A free downloadable PC game based on the film is available, with the hope that people become more aware of the film and therefore, when stood in the video store, decide to watch it.

WildTangent is based in Washington and was founded in 1998 by Alex St. John, the principal creator of Microsoft's DirectX multimedia platform. Customers and partners already include Microsoft, AOL, Yahoo, Disney, Nike, Pepsi and Sony. Its GameChannel enables the direct delivery of games to millions of desktops using idle bandwidth to seamlessly download games in the background while letting users control how and when they are notified about new games. And with the firm's staff made up of veteran producers, artists, and programmers – who have contributed to the production of games such as *NFL Blitz*, *Mortal Kombat*, *The Sims Online* and *Crash Bandicoot* – WildTangent's future looks bright. But analysts warn that even free advergames need to keep up the quality since a hastily put together title could destroy a product's reputation.

> "As in-game adverts don't impact gameplay, they are widely accepted by gamers"

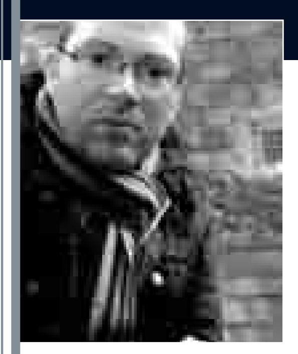
Artistic integrity

With such advances being made, is there a danger that the industry will break its promises over advertising never interfering with gameplay? Maryam Bazargan doesn't think so, taking the view that increased advertising may actually enhance the games-playing experience. "Having spoken to a wide number of games publishers and developers, as well as the platform owners themselves, it looks virtually impossible that mainstream game development will 'sell out' to advertising – entertainment will remain the priority," she says. "However, as technology continues to make gaming more photorealistic we will undoubtedly see more brands integrated into our virtual worlds to make them more credible. Characters will wear actual brands of clothing, eat and drink familiar products, use branded technology devices, and the convergence between the real world and the entertainment world will become almost seamless."

The power of in-game adverts could also bridge the gap between gaming and other forms of entertainment. "As more brands get involved in games, especially if they carry their in-game placements into promotions, this will increase the reach of the games market to non-gaming audiences such as parents," says Bazargan. "The more new brands cross-promote games, the more new consumers will become aware of games and will begin to try them out for themselves and it should create real mass-market gaming appeal."

Nicholas Longano believes there will be few problems, and that gamers may well welcome a shot of paid-for realism. "Core gamers comment on making their game experience more realistic, versus being served fake ads or billboards, as has been the common practice in the past," he says. "All the independent studies published to date clearly indicate that as long as in-game advertising does not impact gameplay, it is widely accepted by gamers. There is no doubt that in-game advertising will be a mainstream phenomenon very soon."





The Players

AFTER HUMBLE BEGINNINGS DESIGNING MUSIC AND SOUND FOR SNES GAMES, DYLAN BEALE HAS EVEN GOT KEANU REEVES PLAYING HIS GAMES NOW. NOT BAD FOR A MAN WHO NEVER INTENDED TO GET INTO THE INDUSTRY.

DYLAN BEALE

BITS STUDIOS

Cricklewood. It sounds like the name of a real ale. Or perhaps a crotchety maths master in a Dickens novel. It certainly doesn't sound like the place to find one of the UK's busiest developers. Bits Studios has been up and running since 1990, though game director Dylan Beale, who we've come to see, has only been here about a decade.

"I never actively looked to get into the industry, but I'm glad I did," he says. "I joined Bits Studios as a musician and sound designer in January 1994 to work on SNES, Genesis, Sega CD and handheld titles. I came from a dance music background so initially the limitations of those platforms were a shock to the system."

Beale has worked with several generations of hardware since then, and during his time in the industry has realised the pressure that developers are under to constantly come up with original ideas. The key to keeping things fresh and making them better, it seems, is to look up… "When you start on a title you always look to leaders in that field for reference – not to plagiarise but for inspiration and a clue into why people enjoyed their work," explains Beale. "This applies to all creative work – the input you receive ultimately forms and influences your output, the amount it's distorted and fused depends on what is in the mix. I think everything from film, music, art, books, architecture to games influences our work. We have guys here who garner influence from one medium more than another which comes out in different ways, whether it's a camera movement from a music video to a camera-focus style from a film… whatever turns us on really. The inspiration for not only each discipline, but each team member, comes from very different sources, and I think this is what makes games such a melting pot of creativity."

Bits' latest project, *Constantine*, will be released alongside the film of the same name in March. This must be stirring some feelings within the Bits ranks as movie licences are notorious for being hit or miss affairs, a lesson the developer learned with *Die Hard: Vendetta*.

"I have to admit there are some very poor movie-licensed games out there which don't do justice to themselves or the movie," Beale says. "Some companies are making games for movies that just shouldn't be done, they aren't even giving themselves a fighting chance with their choice."

We get the distinct impression that he's not going to start naming the offending titles no matter how hard we nudge, but why are movie licences so hard to get right? "With the timescales of creating a game to a movie licence critical, it's very difficult to be off the wall with your ideas," Beale tells us. "You have a lot of people to please before your concept is approved – Keanu Reeves has even had his hands on our latest game – and the consequences of missing your release dates with the movie don't bear thinking about. After that, it's the gameplay touches and control methods that you can be creative with, as well as puzzles and storylines. If it's truly unique then that's a bonus, but something unique and original doesn't always make for good fun. And there are often teething problems which require time to iron out – film licences don't give you that time."

With this added pressure to perform and with fingers that still bear the marks of a previous burning, a licence is perhaps an unlikely choice for Bits' next title, so what's going to be so different this time round?

"You look at *Constantine* and even the biggest critic can see that the material is absolutely perfect for a great game. But market forces show that without a licence nowadays you don't really stand a chance to make any money. We tried the original route with *Rogue Ops*. Maybe we would have had more success with a licence attached – who knows? But because the title was original it was much harder to convince the publisher to give us more money and time to refine and market the product, it was much more of the mentality of get it out there, hope that it sells via word of mouth and then hope we can invest in a sequel with bells and whistles on. It's simply getting harder and harder to make the next Solid Snake…"

Constantine is out in March '05 on PS2 and Xbox and was previewed in issue 25.



"WE'D ALL LOVE TO DO A FOOTBALL GAME. OR MAYBE SOMETHING THAT HAS AN ANIMAL IN A BALL – LIKE A MONKEY"

DYLAN BEALE



COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, **games™** VISITS A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH, A FLYING VISIT TO CANADA TOOK US TO DIGITAL EXTREMES

DIGITAL EXTREMES

FEW DEVELOPERS HAVE THE ENVIABLE REPUTATION OF DIGITAL EXTREMES. NOW ITS STAFF REVEAL THE SECRET OF THEIR SUCCESS…

No-one would have believed the fool who said that a bunch of techies coding pinball games would one day be responsible for the most technologically advanced first-person shooters on the planet. Perhaps this is why the name Digital Extremes is strangely appropriate for the company that continually enjoys pushing the boundaries in one direction, even after its humble beginnings at the opposite end of the gaming spectrum.

Founded in 1993 after James Schmalz, now creative director, made a shareware pinball game, Digital Extremes set up home in London, Ontario. Since then, the company has grown to accommodate around 40 staff over two development studios. And it's clear that the staff are what Digital Extremes values most. "We hire almost exclusively on raw talent and passion – with those two things you can go far in any field your talent applies to," says Schmalz. "The strength in DE is based on talent and passion for what we do. We are always on the look-out for people like this since they are rare." Indeed, given the reputation the company has built over the past few years, Digital Extremes can afford to be picky. Whereas most



DIGITAL EXTREMISTS

1 JAMES SCHMALZ, FOUNDER AND CREATIVE DIRECTOR

IN A NUTSHELL: Digital Extremes is the only company Schmalz has worked for in his games career. During the time he's spent there he's worked on classics such as *Extreme Pinball, Unreal* and *Unreal Tournament*. He is now adding the finishing touches to *Pariah*.

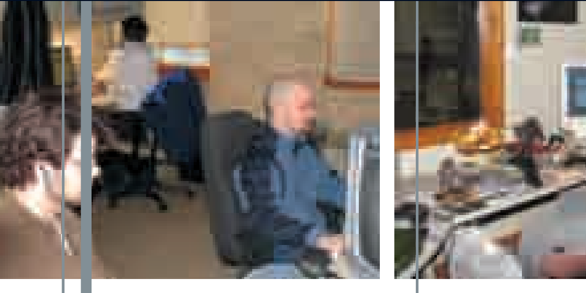
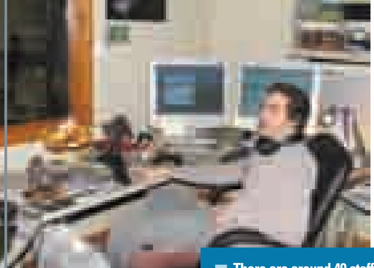
2 PANCHO EEKELS, LEAD DESIGNER (not pictured)

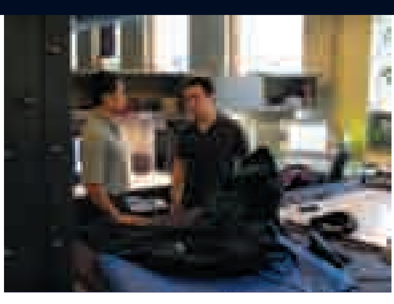
IN A NUTSHELL: Having started as a level designer over nine years ago he has worked his way to the near-top of Digital Extremes. Having contributed maps for almost all the *Unreal* games, he is finishing off *Pariah* and then starting work on *Dark Sector*.

developers will insist they cherry pick the quality employees within the field, there is no denying that the maker of *Unreal*, *Unreal Tournament* and *Unreal Championship* will always be guaranteed first choice. This is undoubtedly the key to its success as a developer, and rubber-stamps the quality on any of its projects. This gives DE a relatively safe position in today's unpredictable market, but it's the first to admit that playing it safe is vital for the survival of even the most respected independent developers. "To make sure we stay up and running, we can't make many mistakes, so… the games we make are proven concepts with innovation on top," explains lead designer Pancho Eekels. "Then again, almost all developers out there, big or small, have this approach so the competition is fierce."

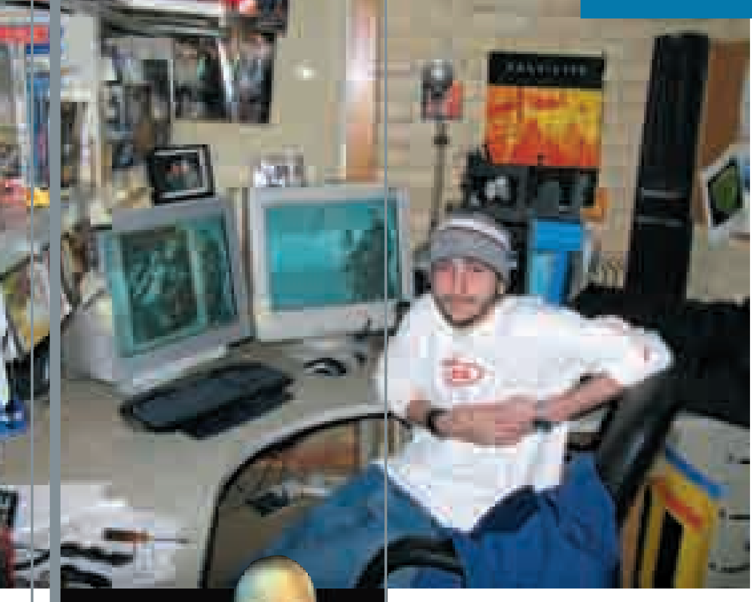
Schmalz is in two minds about being an independent developer and weighs up the pros and cons, stating: "Independence is both good and bad. It's good because you get to make the games you want to make. It's bad because a publisher will never treat your game as well as it does something it owns and controls itself." This is certainly true, but perhaps the publishers are keen to make more projects their own. EA's recent shopping spree, for example, has been well publicised because of the mass of high-profile developers it's been courting. Digital Illusions and Criterion are two of the industry's most respected houses, and would make fine additions to any publisher's in-house line-up. However, there is a risk that this would allow the developers' projects' quality to be compromised to meet deadlines and financial requirements. Digital Extremes employees have their own views on the stifling of creativity. "It comes down to risk," says Schmalz. "If you have the next incredibly creative idea that is entirely not proven, who is going to give you $10 million to make that? Not many people, because that's a lot

> "INDEPENDENCE IS GOOD, BUT A PUBLISHER WILL NEVER TREAT YOUR GAME AS WELL AS IT DOES SOMETHING IT OWNS AND CONTROLS ITSELF"
> JAMES SCHMALZ, DIGITAL EXTREMES




There are around 40 staff at Digital Extremes, split between offices in Toronto and London (that's London, Ontario, by the way).




of money. Sure, it might be the next *Sims*, but it also might be a pile of crap."

So what of Digital Extremes' current projects? *Pariah* is shaping up to be a chip off the old block, and could be the game to finally wrench the *Halo 2*-playing masses back into the game stores for their next first-person-shooter fix. Digital Extremes is well aware that the FPS market is tough because of the sheer number of games within it, and following the likes of *Half-Life 2* on PC and *Halo 2* on Xbox must be a daunting prospect. "The FPS market has a lot of players in it and it's something that you absolutely need to innovate in some way just for people to take notice," says Schmalz. "It's great if people know our past products and take a look at *Pariah* because of that." Eekels agrees, adding that a little something extra is always needed. "I think having a unique (and good) feature to your game adds a fair amount of interest," he says. "Good marketing is also key. Without that, you can have the best game in the universe but it will get trampled and forgotten." In a way this makes the decision to sail under the flag of HIP Interactive an odd choice for Digital

SEVEN-YEAR ITCH

Digital Extreme's first *Unreal* title was released in 1998, with *Unreal Tournament* following in 1999. To date, there have been been around ten *Unreal* games released, not including the add-on packs and compilations. But it's time to move on…

"DON'T PIRATE OUR GAMES – THINK OF WHAT YOU'RE DOING TO US AND THE REST OF THE INDUSTRY"

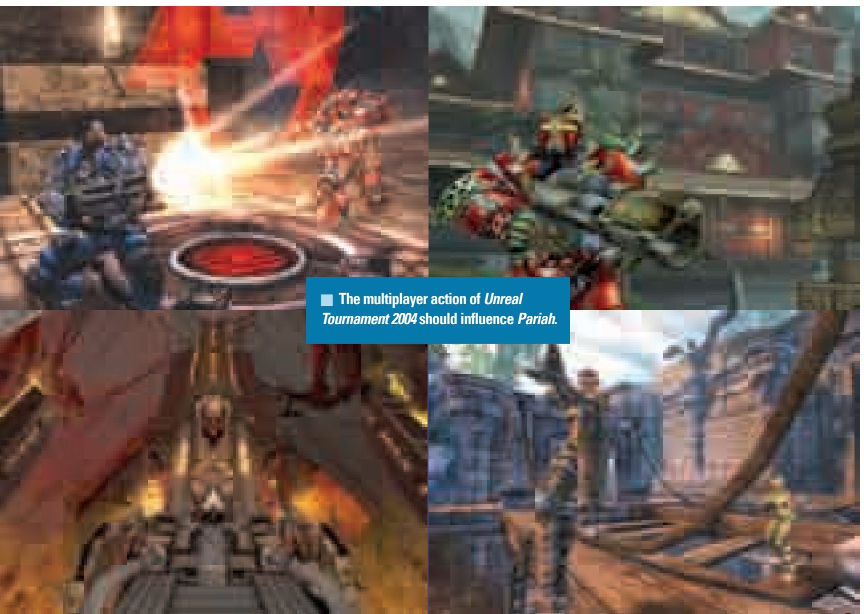
PANCHO EEKELS, DIGITAL EXTREMES

Extremes. The publisher has yet to handle a huge title, and how this will affect *Pariah* remains to be seen, but as Digital Extremes has plenty riding on the project – most notably its reputation since it parted from Epic Games – it would be unlikely that HIP will under-sell the title.

Speaking about the break from Epic, with whom Digital Extremes developed the *Unreal* brand, the guys at the studio seem more than comfortable with the move. "Simply put, we decided to start making our own games," says Eekels. "Epic has been a great partner with the *Unreal* series, but I think it was time for us to move on. Plus working on the same game with many miles between the two offices doesn't do any good to any product. I feel proud of what we have done for *Unreal* and *UT*. I still feel compelled to make new maps for it but have no time. It is a lot of fun." This separation was undoubtedly the result of a maturing of the company rather than a destructive rift, and one sign of the company's growing stature was the opening of a second studio in Toronto in 2001. "The goal with having another company in Toronto was to simply have more games in a staggered production," explains Eekels. This presumably refers to the already announced next-generation title *Dark Sector*, which has drawn plenty of attention in the gaming press. Given the company's

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE…

When it started out, Digital Extremes made games such as *Epic Pinball* and *Extreme Pinball*. Although this is where many think the developer's roots lie, it is important to note that the company has made a real killing from the creation of shareware. While Digital Extremes and Epic were working as one studio they created the *Unreal* engine, which powers 90 per cent of all first-person shooters in today's market. Licensing out this technology has afforded them a healthy legacy to fall back on, but as James Schmalz notes, this reserve could quickly dry up in the modern climate. "It's a completely different world these days from the early days of shareware," he says. "It's the difference between using your little digital camera to make a home movie and a full-blown motion picture. The budget for my first shareware game was zero. Now we're looking at over $10 million." With Epic retaining the rights to the *Unreal* engine since the two studios parted, Digital Extremes will be hoping that the games-buying public come out in support of *Pariah* to keep its future certain.



The multiplayer action of *Unreal Tournament 2004* should influence *Pariah*.

specialist knowledge, it would be a safe bet that the new game takes place in the first-person, and Eekels is quick to enthuse about the genre, noting that "I really like FPS games, I like being in the world as opposed to looking at your guy. I like to feel like I am really there." Throwing a slight spanner in the works, he adds, "Other games that pique my interest are RTS games and massively multiplayer titles. I love playing with other people in a continuing world – unexpected things happen this way. I find AI in most single-player games just utterly boring to play against or alongside unless the gameplay mechanic is strong enough for me to keep going."

Whatever the future holds for Digital Extremes, the team have plenty of proud moments to look back on, including "just lasting for 11 years and remaining independent," says Schmalz. "It's a rare thing that we have been able to do what we have done." The quality of *Pariah* already seems to be filtering through to the game-buying public, and hopefully this will mean that the developer can continue to be independent for the next 11 years. Even so, Eekels adds a parting comment that clearly warns that great independent developers such as Digital Extremes need to be shown the respect they deserve in order to survive. "Support your independent developers and don't pirate our games," he says. "Think of what you are doing to us and the rest of the industry. There are hard-working people behind these productions."

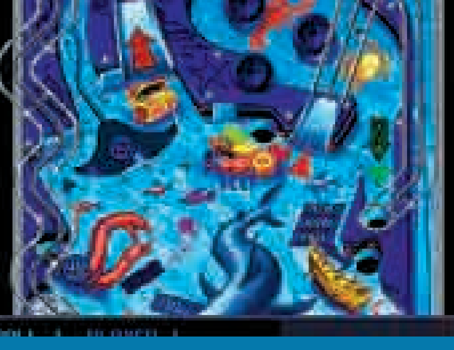


Digital Extremes' first-person credentials should set it up for success with *Pariah*. Lock and load…

FROM STEEL BALLS TO THE SMELL OF CORDITE

EPIC PINBALL (1993)

The game that started the ball rolling (ahem) over at Digital Extremes has become something of a legend. Along with similar pinball titles developed by also-digitally-named Digital Illusions, *Epic Pinball* presented a slick and colourful gaming experience that's still copied in today's budget titles.

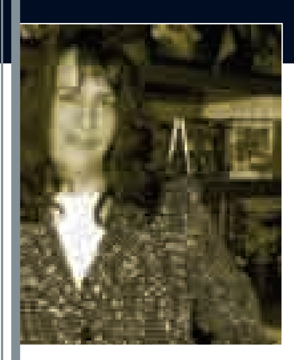


UNREAL (1998)

The original first-person shooter for the modern age has spawned countless imitators and employers of the infamous *Unreal* engine. It remains a successful series, the latest version of which, *Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict*, will be arriving on the Xbox in April.

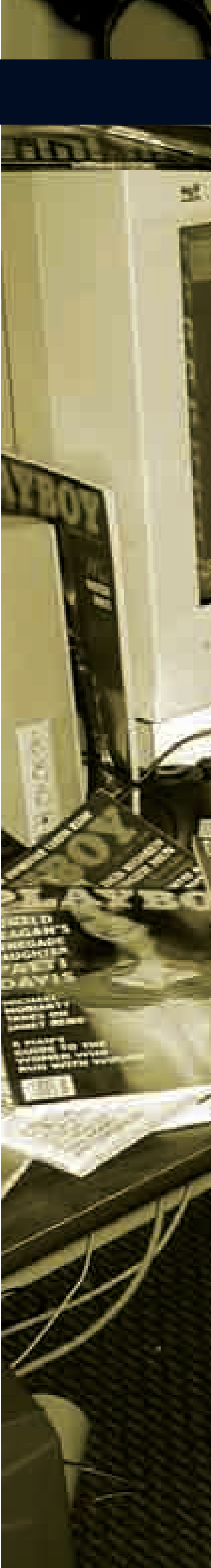
UNREAL TOURNAMENT (1999)

Another leap, but this time within the FPS genre. *Unreal Tournament* was one of the first games to introduce arena-style combat to the PC, and then the world of online gaming. Since its conception the sub-series has spawned *UT 2003* and *2004*, both of which are seen as some of the finest in the genre.



The Players

BRENDA BRAITHWAITE WANTS TO LET US LIVE IT UP LIKE HUGH HEFNER. AND WITH 15 YEARS IN THE GAMING BEHIND HER, SHE KNOWS JUST HOW TO MAKE THAT HAPPEN…



BRENDA BRAITHWAITE

CYBERLORE STUDIOS

Of all the rooms we've conducted interviews in, this was the most interesting. Scattered all around was a range of Playboy memorabilia: cups, T-shirts, bunny ears and an impressive stack of magazines spanning 50 years of Playboy history. Although this heap of gentlemen's literature would usually be found hiding beneath the beds of teenage lads, at Cyberlore Studios this particular stack of adult magazines is considered valuable research material. And the person leading this research? *Playboy: The Mansion*'s lead designer, Brenda Braithwaite. So how exactly do you work your way up to wrestling with that famous rabbit logo?

"Back in 1982, Linda Currie – who's now a designer at Blue Fang working on the *Zoo Tycoon* series – asked me if I was interested in taking over a job she would soon be vacating, working at Sir-Tech Software answering people's questions about the *Wizardry* series," Braithwaite explains. "I was only 15 at the time, and the thought that someone was willing to pay me to play games was hysterical, really. I mean, what kid wouldn't love that? Little did I know that would be the beginning of a very long career in the industry." After listing the many games she has had a hand in creating, it's obvious that the 'very long career' that Braithwaite speaks of has been a busy one. Titles are mentioned that we hadn't thought about for years (*Freakin' Funky Fuzzballs*), and there are more recent names like *Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes*. But after working on so many games where do you look for inspiration?

"It's actually really easy to come up with ideas. If I weren't talking to you right now, I'd be back working on one of the three game ideas that I'm currently investigating," Braithwaite replies. "You just make yourself receptive and you'll get one, corny as that sounds. What is difficult, however, is to get those ideas sold. We're in a catch-22 market: the public wants original, innovative gameplay and ideas; however, publishers can rarely afford to fund them, so you see sequels, derivative products and licensed titles or some combination of the three." Some might argue that *Playboy: The Mansion* falls into a couple of those categories – it's clearly licensed, and the gameplay is reminiscent of life-management games like *The Sims*. However, this game does have the obvious (and huge) advantage in that it puts you in the slippers of Hugh Hefner and allows you to get as close as you ever will to living the Playboy dream.

"With the *Playboy: The Mansion* title, the inspiration for everything came from the life of Hugh Hefner and the Playboy empire itself. Our project lead and lead artist, Seth Spaulding, visited the Playboy Mansion in LA to photograph it so that our artists could accurately reproduce it in the game. Many things from the texture of the walls on the grotto to the rich wood interiors came from that trip. The missions in the game were influenced by the real steps Hef took as he built the empire. The clothing lines in the game feature real clothing from Playboy's catalogue. We were very fortunate with this project – Playboy virtually opened the doors for us."

The thought that immediately springs to mind when discussing a game of this type is that of quality. Attempting to keep the gameplay prominent and preventing the licence from turning the title into a parade of naughty bits must be a challenge.

"It was a lot easier than you might think," Braithwaite assures us. "Playboy is an exceptionally classy brand. The biggest challenge was the completely uncharted territory we were exploring – no-one has ever tried to do what we did on consoles. We worked very closely with Sony and Microsoft throughout the whole process, and I think we're all pleased with the outcome. The second biggest challenge, of course, is combating the stereotype. People may not be expecting it to be a great game, and most certainly they're not expecting it to be a game women will really enjoy. Neither of those is true, of course. There's a fine line where things go from 'okay' to 'graphic' – and I definitely want to stay on the 'okay' side of that line…"

Playboy: The Mansion is out on 4 March on PC, PlayStation2 and Xbox.



"PEOPLE HAVE EXPLORED VIOLENCE RIGHT UP TO ITS EDGE, BUT SEXUALITY? NOTHING"

BRENDA BRAITHWAITE

"Place Your

Compared to home consoles, handheld gaming has traditionally been an impulse-led, second-place pastime. However, times are changing. As gadget fever sweeps the nation a new breed of super handhelds are gearing up to battle for a completely new market. Portable gaming culture is about to change – games™ finds out how.



Hands"

Handheld gaming is about to explode. What has for years been regarded as gaming fodder for children or a distraction during train rides is to be given a new lease of life. Handheld gaming will soon stop being the electronic equivalent of those embossed-cover airport novels. It's going to take over the world.

This almost happened before, back when Nintendo's Game Boy, Atari's Lynx and Sega's Game Gear were all new, exciting pieces of equipment taking the positions under Christmas trees normally reserved for regular consoles. However, handheld gaming failed to evolve as home machines have. Portable-gaming market leader Nintendo has kept the market in second place – the inexpensive hardware delivering games far below the standard of home machines has ensured handheld consoles are rarely any customer's main gaming platform.

Over the years variations of Nintendo's Game Boy have seen off numerous competitors and maintained strong sales – all without much of a technical step-up. "We're sort of amazed ourselves as each year goes by," Perrin Kaplan, vice president of corporate affairs at Nintendo, has said. "The normal life cycle of a product just hasn't applied to the Game Boy. It's definitely one for the [record] books."

Much of the success Nintendo has had in this sector has been down to short-sightedness on the part of rivals who failed to read the market properly. Sega and Atari, among others, made mistakes that could have been avoided, thus preventing the handheld market from progressing at the same technological rate as home consoles.

The main mistake was battery life. Both the Lynx and Game Gear seriously under-performed in this regard due to their backlit colour screens and both ran on six AA batteries. Handheld gaming was technically inferior and more expensive. Sega's US-only Nomad that ran off Mega Drive cartridges was a real battery beast – 45 minutes tops on high-strength batteries.

The battery issue has been resolved in recent times. Long overdue, Nintendo finally introduced a rechargeable battery in its GBA SP and any new challengers will also boast this feature, including Sony's PSP – the biggest ever threat to Nintendo's dominance in the handheld market – which can last for around five hours per full charge. Considering the PSP's disc accessing, technical quality and the screen ▷

“Place Your Hands”



size and brightness this is really quite good. Nintendo’s DS handheld can last even longer, boasting about ten hours of play before it needs recharging – not bad for a machine with two screens.

Also playing a large part in holding back handheld gaming is the trend that sees companies porting straight conversions of old games. This killed the Game Gear (the machine was plagued with Master System ports at a time when the 8-bit machine was fading away in light of the 16-bit Mega Drive), and when Nintendo released the SNES-standard Game Boy Advance the machine found itself receiving many games people had played before, suggesting this was a console for retro heads and children young enough to enjoy these old games for the first game. If a system is to be a success it needs its own software.

While the Game Boy range of hardware has always sold well, it doesn’t shift much software. Though a few popular franchises have made the top of the charts (such as *Pokémon*), combined unit sales don’t match those of console titles because handheld games are simpler, and thus seen as inferior, and fail to generate the same level of excitement. This is what Sony needs to address if the PSP is to survive. According to market analysts, Sony is losing several hundred dollars on each unit sold and, initially, it’s going to be the games making that money back. However, if the PSP gets thrown identical versions of PS2 games then people are more likely to buy the game for the PS2 – they won’t buy both, that’s for sure.

Electronic Arts, a publisher known for multiformat releases, predictably plans to punt *FIFA* over to the PSP, with EA’s worldwide studio president Don Mattrick pledging “the same degree of support as the PlayStation2”. For the PSP, however, if games are the same as the console versions it’s unlikely people will buy them instead of a game they can play at home on a big screen. Without the extra revenue from games, the PSP will continue to lose money and will eventually die out. The real test will be when the machine launches over here with a PSP version of *Grand Theft Auto*. This is the game that consistently out-performs anything else at retail for PS2 and big things are expected of its PSP outing. However, we already know this game is to be based on *GTA III*, so how similar it is to that game will also influence its sales.

THE PITCH

While all eyes are on the PSP and DS to duke it out, the machines are initially aiming at wildly different demographics within the same market, as their prices indicate (£180 is looking likely for the PSP, with £99.99 confirmed for the DS). The PSP is a stunningly cool and dazzling piece of consumer electronics – to look at it seems right at home next to digital cameras, mobile phones, portable DVD players and MP3 players. It’s this ‘luxury gadget’ feel that’s necessary to attract the top-end 20- and 30-something gamers who buy things like iPods. “I’m hoping it’s the sort of product that overcomes the barriers that people have to playing in public,” says David Wilson, head of PR for Sony Computer Entertainment UK, highlighting the common problem of people feeling self-conscious about playing something that

> "The DS's unique features will attract a lot of gamers, but the PSP will really hit the mainstream"

Places made better with a handheld..

1. On the toilet
Going to the toilet wastes time. It's not fun and, particularly if you're a man, can take ages. Make the time fly with some games – you may not want to leave. (Though be careful at work lest you arouse suspicion.)

2. On a train
Avoid the stares of strangers by having a genuine excuse not to look anyone in the eye throughout the whole journey. But beware, lonely people may use your handheld to start awkward, protracted conversations.

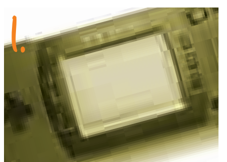
3. In bed
If you have a partner who moans whenever you play your games, the backlit wonder of modern handheld machines means you can play games in the dark, while they sleep, without them knowing.

4. In church
Church is boring. Make weddings, christenings and even funerals more fun by playing Wi-Fi games with other similarly equipped churchgoers. Just make sure you don't cheer when you win.

5. Dentist surgery
Waiting in a cold room for a dentist to cause you unnecessary pain or for the doctor to play with your genitals is never fun. Ease the tension by playing with your handheld. It's better than the magazines.

looks like a toy. "It looks like a desirable adult piece of hi-tech," Wilson insists.

Also key to attracting the gadget audience is the range of media possibilities on PSP thanks to its UMD (Universal Media Disc) drive and Memory Stick compatibility, giving owners the luxury of porting over any music or movie files from a PC and playing

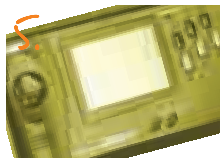














them on the move, pushing the handheld out further than just games. "It's a highly desirable unit that offers gaming – and a whole lot more – on the go," Wilson points out. "Movie clips, music audio and video all come to life in the palm of your hand."

This is all so far from the DS's objectives it becomes hard to see why the machines are being compared in the first place. Understandably, Nintendo doesn't see the PSP as direct competition. In fact, it doesn't even see its GBA SP as direct competition either. Nintendo's intention isn't for the DS to phase out the GBA in the manner that most subsequent hardware releases tend to do with the previous generation. "For us the Nintendo DS is a 'third pillar' which we consider as separate from our other formats," explains Nintendo's handheld project manager, James Honeywell. "I hope [it] will also be seen as something different from all other forms of gaming currently available." The problem is, the DS is backwards compatible with GBA games, which gives the impression the DS is merely the next instalment in the long-running Game Boy franchise. In Japan, sales of GBA hardware were dramatically reduced after the DS launch, which suggests the market won't sustain two low-price handhelds.

Winners and losers..
1. Atari Lynx (1989)
2. PC Engine GT (1990)
3. Game Gear (1991)
4. Virtual Boy (1995)
5. Sega Nomad (1995)
6. Game Boy Color (1998)

Against the PSP, though, the DS should be fine at first – it's a different price and its games seem predominantly aimed at a younger audience. Also, the dual-screen set-up, touch screen and microphone create an emphasis on interactivity – something the PSP (a machine offering conventional games) simply cannot offer. "We have created a new system that will allow us to offer new gaming experiences to hardcore gamers and first time gamers alike," says Honeywell, confident the unique features and low price of the console will see many different types of people plumping for a DS.

However, the PSP seems more likely to hit the mainstream. Nintendo believes the DS will attract non-gamers thanks to its unique abilities, but in truth, the PSP is in the best position to do this as it is directly aiming itself ▷



at people who wouldn't necessarily already own a handheld games machine. Recently, thanks to the introduction of PDAs, MP3 players, portable DVD players, camcorders, digital cameras and, most importantly, mobile phones, a whole new market has emerged from high-end portable consumer electronics. This is a highly lucrative market and one yet to feel the presence of a dedicated videogames device. Sony's sleek, technical masterpiece is perfect for this arena. It's cool in every way, and this is what this end of the market wants. Sony is essentially going to apply the PlayStation business model (the one that stole the home console market from Nintendo and Sega by making games fashionable) to the PSP in an attempt to repeat history.

TALKING A GOOD FIGHT

Previously, the only outlet for games in this 'gadget' market has been on mobile phones, without a doubt the most popular portable device at the moment. "Games have become the most attractive mobile content and offer a real added value for all mobile users," Dr Anthony Park of Samsung Telecommunications Europe announced in a recent press release to promote a mobile gaming championship, organised by Samsung Fun Club, to be held at the World Cyber Games in Germany. Samsung must truly believe in mobile games if it believes people are playing them frequently enough to harbour a desire to play competitively. However, despite this confidence, you only have to look at the championship's game of choice – *Babe Rally* – to see that games on phones are not yet good enough to ensure that owners won't be tempted by offerings from elsewhere. These games are incredibly simple and rely on users being patient enough to negotiate their phone's keypad.

The only mobile phone to really attempt games properly is Nokia's N-Gage, combining a mobile phone with what appeared to be a genuine handheld games console. The problem is that it doesn't do either very well. Mobile phone sales are often dictated by how the unit looks and, indeed, how it makes the user look. In this regard the N-Gage is disappointing – it looks ugly and people look daft when 'side-talking' into it (the original model, at least); and the games suffer because of a small 'portrait' screen and awkward button layout. Nokia never seems to have really pushed the console, though, and perhaps has fairly low expectations for it, made clear by comments from Anssi Vanjoki, executive vice president of Nokia, who simply described the machine as, "a fantastic way to waste time".

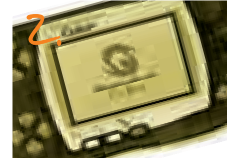
Communication elements are being worked into all the next-gen gaming handhelds, even if acting as a phone isn't necessarily a priority. The newest entrant to the race is Tiger Telematics' Gizmondo, a handheld gaming device with its own special abilities. "One of the many things that makes the Gizmondo stand out is the GPS hardware," says James Beaven of Indigo Pearl, the company doing the PR for the machine. "As well as location-based services and turn-by-turn satellite navigation, for the first time ever the Gizmondo will integrate this technology into gaming. This will essentially turn the physical world around us into a massive game arena. The possibilities are endless." Sounds ambitious.

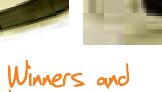
> "The N-Gage was intended to be a phone and a games console, but it doesn't do either particularly well"

What both the DS and PSP have in common is wireless – Wi-Fi – connectivity, enabling users to play against each other without the need for an extra cable. The inclusion of the 802.11 wireless standard also gives both machines the ability to connect to the internet via wireless home routers and public Wi-Fi hot spots, opening up online gaming and web-browsing possibilities. "Multiplayer games have always had tremendous appeal," explains Karthik Bala, CEO of Vicarious Visions, the developer behind *Spider-Man 2* for the DS. "With built-in wireless capabilities… it's so easy to get connected and play against other gamers. It's going to make wireless handheld gaming very mainstream."

And it's not just about real-time competitive gameplay, either. "Wireless is going to open up potentially new business models for handheld developers and publishers," Bala continues. "Besides making multiplayer games accessible to a lot more players, it also opens up the opportunity for user-created content to be







shared, as well as developer-created downloadable content to further enrich and expand on the original retail game."

IMMORTALITY – TAKE IT, IT'S YOURS!

The future is waiting for handheld gaming to take over. If everything's done correctly and the machines have decent, original games to keep people interested, handhelds will no longer be relegated to a distant second place and will become a regular and important feast in the gaming diet. Perhaps – with gadgets being in vogue and considering the power offered by these portable machines – handhelds could even become more popular than home consoles. This is unlikely, but a similar level of importance is possible, especially given the Wi-Fi functionality and growing number of public Wi-Fi hotspots. Handhelds have a distinct place and purpose.

The real question is, which machine is going to push the market forward? Or will they co-exist merrily and do it together? We suggest the DS, while giving the hardcore something unique, won't be as successful in expanding the portable market as the PSP. The PSP is going to hit the mainstream hard with its cool styling, amazing graphics and additional media functions. The games may be traditional in terms of structure and control, but this is what Joe public wants – it's unlikely your average, fashion-conscious male will feel too comfortable playing with the DS on the train. This isn't to say the DS is going to be overwhelmed; it will do fine at satisfying the same demographic Nintendo handhelds have always taken care of before (children and hardcore gamers) – its only danger is when the PSP eventually comes down in price.

As for mobile phones and the Gizmondo, we're not sure how they'll compete with such a strong double-team of the DS and PSP and their irrepressibly popular brands. While mobile phone games can make money by being cheap, they're no substitute for DS or PSP games. But it's the Gizmondo with the bleakest future. The console is already out in this country, but you can't find it anywhere except for a few stores. The design of the console isn't as sophisticated as the PSP and the games just aren't there. And when all's said and done, this is what will decide the success of each handheld. As ever, it's all about the games. So take a look – what do you want to play?



Winners and losers...

1. Neo-Geo Pocket Color (1999)
2. WonderSwan Color (1999)
3. Game Boy Advance (2001)
4. GBA SP (2003)

Do it yourself

FORGET WATER INTO WINE – THIS MAN TURNS HOME CONSOLES INTO HANDHELDS

While researching this feature, we stumbled across something amazing. We found a website detailing one man's amazing quest to turn conventional home games consoles into useable handheld machines.

By taking apart home consoles, joypads and portable TVs, before resealing all the contents back up in a condensed, all-in-one portable package, this man has successfully made his own handheld versions of just about every home console out there. But how does someone become able to do such things?

"I have a background in graphic arts, which helps with the aesthetic design phase as well as vector layout," Ben Heckendorn, the man behind the machines, explains. "As for electronics, I just experiment a lot, read a lot of product description PDFs and cross my fingers."

Ben is keen to play down the need for any serious technical expertise and is convinced anyone can create their own machines if given correct guidance. "I've just written a book on the subject" he enthuses. "It instructs the reader through the entire process for four different systems – Atari, NES, SNES and PSone."

If you fancy making your own handheld device, visit Ben's website at www.benheck.com for more details.



This isn't a joke – these are genuine, working consoles.





Old, new – no console is safe from the minimising tendencies of ben Heckendorn. The man's a visionary.



In space, no-one can hear you order your team to breach and clear… *Star Wars* goes all *Rainbow Six* as the Clone Troopers form a squad. But is the game any good?

Star Wars: Republic Commando 96



REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, games™ is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below 7 (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad we'll make sure you know, if it's great we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.



Crossing the huge lake isn't exactly plain sailing, if you get our drift.



Occasionally, running away is the only way to stay alive. It pays to be a coward sometimes. And when you see what you'll be running away from, you'll understand.

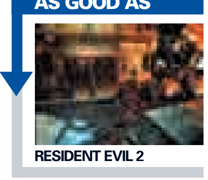


DINO CRISIS 2

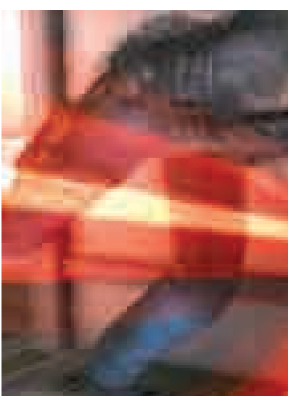


BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



RESIDENT EVIL 2





ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

CAMERAMAN: The over-the-shoulder angle gives the series a whole new feel…

CONTROL: … As well as making the traditional 'tank' controls seem that much more manageable.

RESIDENT EVIL 4

BAD BOY, LEON – STRAIGHT TO BED WITH NO ZOMBIES

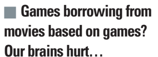
It is 1996. Capcom has just unleashed the T-Virus upon the world with *Resident Evil*. Taking its cues from *Alone In The Dark* and splicing jumpy scares with some of the hammiest dialogue and delivery in the history of gaming, a legend was born. Scroll forward almost a decade and *Resident Evil: Outbreak* is still milking the same sore-uddered zombies. But as films like *Dawn Of The Dead* and *28 Days Later* introduce the superzombie, the lumbering annoyances of *Resident Evil* start to pale in comparison. The solution? Capcom has decreed that 2005 shall be the year that the undead stay six feet under where they belong.

So gone are the zombies caused by Umbrella's dirty viruses but our man quickly discovers a far more dangerous (not to mention numerous) foe in a remote Spanish village. Suffice to say that bad quickly turns to worse as the situation snowballs – a politely worded letter from Capcom more or less threatens viral infection if we reveal anything more. In the midst of this craziness, Leon S. Kennedy, cop-for-a-day star of *Resident Evil 2*, is looking for the President's daughter. Yes, it's as clichéd as they come but Capcom's handling of the plot does throw up several surprises over its course. Expect a few old friends to be name-dropped, just to hammer home the fact that while it might not seem it at times, this is definitely a *Resident Evil* game.

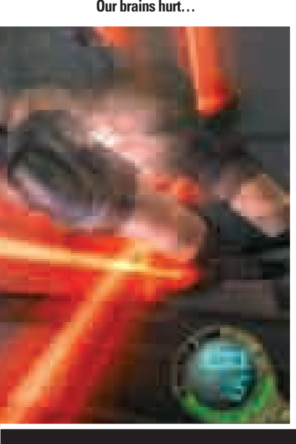
But it's not just the origins of your adversaries that have changed. Both gameplay and camera have been altered to an extent whereby it could almost be argued that this is *Resident Evil* only in name. To do so would be foolish, of course – after five proper games, a slew of spin-offs and a pair of dreadful Hollywood efforts, it would take a buffoon to argue that the series wasn't in need of a shot of originality. So even though it may not be that drastic a shake-up, the co-ordinated yelling and walls of 18-legged death manage to feel a million miles away from the moaning animated corpses that have shuffled around since 1996. The clicking claws of the Hunters also give way, the ominous chanting of the countless monks that occupy the castle area now being the sound to really make your flesh crawl. As nasty as these new threats may be conceptually, it's the sublime implementation and graphic horror that will really make you take notice.

From start to finish, *Resident Evil 4* exudes class and polish. Capcom has seemingly stopped at nothing in the crafting of every aspect of the presentation, from overall feel to a staggering attention to detail, and the result is not only one of the most beautiful GameCube games to date but one of the best looking titles of this generation. Even with armies of enemies on-screen and a fistful of lighting and weather effects in full flow, *Resident Evil 4* doesn't break a sweat. Couple this with an

"THIS IS NOT ONLY ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL GAMECUBE GAMES TO DATE, BUT ONE OF THE BEST LOOKING TITLES OF THIS GENERATION"



Games borrowing from movies based on games? Our brains hurt…



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube (US)

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
$49.99

RELEASE
18 March
(US: Out Now)

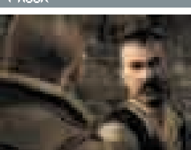
PLAYERS
1



24:00 TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

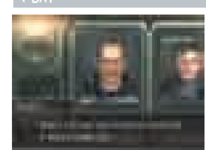
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

1 HOUR



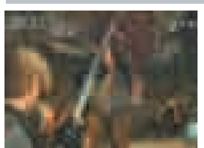
The villagers are getting restless and the only thing that calms them down is 9mm sedation. You'll quickly learn that being outnumbered isn't fun, but you'll get used to it…

1 DAY



As the castle area draws on, the monks pull out all the stops to bring down "the American agent". Keeping a cool head takes a back seat to keeping your head, period.

1 WEEK



With your first play finished and the extras offering plenty of extended play, it's probably time to start over. But do you go from the same save or brave crazy hard Professional mode?

"CLAWED FREAKS, GIANT INSECTS AND RABID DOGS ALL PUT YOU SUITABLY ON EDGE, AND EVEN THE FAINT, DISTANT HUM OF A CHAINSAW CAN BE ENOUGH TO INDUCE BLIND PANIC"

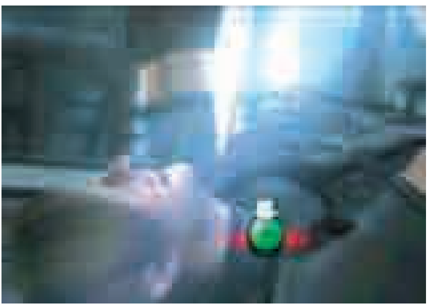
unsettling Pro Logic II soundtrack (helpful in locating aggressors as well as scaring the bejesus out of you) and you've got a nigh-on perfect example of videogame aesthetics. Stylistically and technically, this is truly magnificent.

Considering there are so many more enemies in *Resident Evil 4* than series followers may be used to, you might expect them to be a little easier to see off. You'd be so wrong. While they're not the smartest foes, it's terrifyingly simple to become overrun by them, and although the jumpy thrills of the franchise still exist they take a back seat to the fear of being drowned in a mob of angry simpletons. But even when crowds give way to stronger enemies, a similar tension is retained – clawed freaks, giant insects and rabid dogs (all before you get off the first disc) put you suitably on edge and even the faint, distant hum of a chainsaw can be enough to induce blind panic. Herein lies the secret of success for every budding Leon S. Kennedy. Keep calm, keep your distance and you'll keep alive. Even a moment of frenzied shooting can be a one-way ticket to decapitation (or worse).

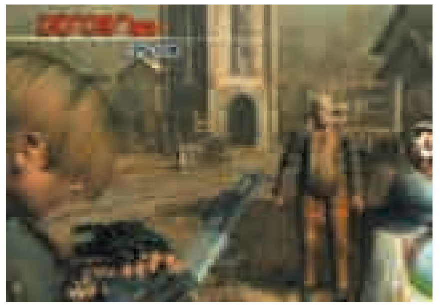
Also key to your survival strategy is the well-implemented hit-location system. With all but the sturdiest of foes, a bullet in the leg will cause a stumble or trip (with potential for a close-quarter follow-up – Leon can kick or even suplex staggered enemies), body shots slow their progress and a shot in an arm can cause anything being carried to be dropped. Of course, a bullet or two to the head is the quickest way to fell virtually any adversary but you're far from alone in this knowledge – as you progress, you'll notice enemies covering up key areas, forcing you to use other, less effective strategies to execute them. Still, there's a lot to be said for the classic method of a kneecap shot to drop someone followed by a good stabbing while they're down, especially with the knife handily assigned to the Left Trigger. Don't try this at home.

"WHAT'RE YOU BUYING?"

Ladies and gentlemen, introducing the single most entertaining merchant since *Symphony Of The Night*. While your first encounter may not be particularly humorous, his repeated enquiries eventually come to provide more comic relief than they really should, if only thanks to how very silly the trader's voice and choice of words are. Sounding a bit like a pirate, statements like "I'll buy that for a high price!" are barked at you before he laughs maniacally and you feel obliged to leave. Quickly. Just don't take your knife to him – he can't sell you goodies in a silly voice from beyond the grave, y'know. As we found to our peril.



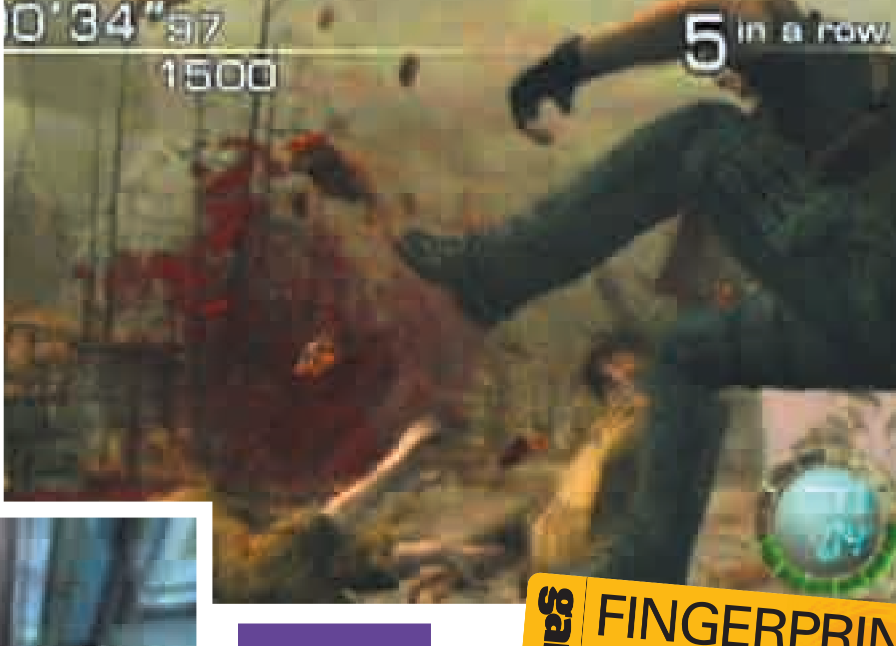
Mash the A button or Leon dies – it's as simple as that.



If there's been a worse time to reload a shotgun, we've yet to see it.

"WHAT'RE YOU SELLING?"

As well as weapons, ammo and healing items, the huge locations hide a wealth of, well, wealth. Most of this comes as cold, hard currency (pesetas being the local tender), but for the eagle-eyed hunter far greater riches lie in wait. Valuables such as jewellery and antiques are tucked away in the dingiest corners of the game – by decorating these with some of the gems that can also be found over the course of the adventure, their values rocket and our friend, the merchant, will pay through the nose. Feeling lazy? Pick up the Treasure Map from the merchant and all the goodies will become clear as day on your map. Looks like cheaters do prosper after all…





FAQs

Q. HOW LONG IS IT?
Just shy of 20 hours on your first play but you'll shave a lot off on a second run.

Q. PLENTY OF AMMO?
Just enough to scrape through – wasteful players might have a few problems later on.

Q. BEST MOMENT?
Too many to call. Set pieces and general gameplay serve up some outstanding moments.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

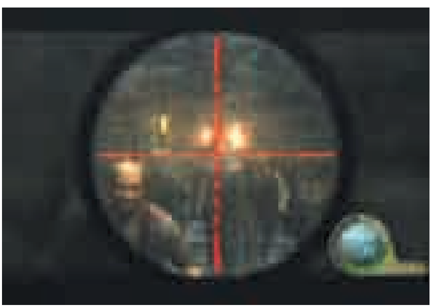
PUSH IT: Quick Time Events (à la *Shenmue*) crop up in many of the cut-scenes.

KILLTACULAR: Watch the body count rise higher than every other *Resident Evil* game combined.

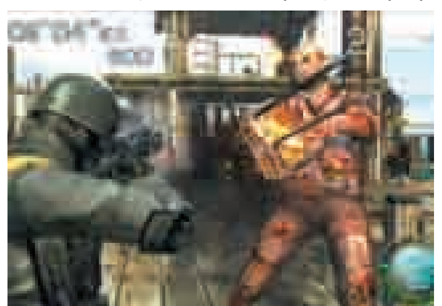
One thing to note about *Resident Evil 4*, though, is that even the best player will all but certainly die at least once in their first playthrough. A poorly timed reload can give a horde enough time to seriously butcher your poor body and certain later foes can take you out with a single well-placed blow, but it doesn't stop there. Many of the Quick Time Event cut-scenes present life-or-death situations for Leon and should you fail to hit the right buttons in time you'll be headed straight for the Game Over screen, usually via some degree of claret explosion. If nothing else, this makes sure that you're paying attention to every cut-scene equally. So used to the likes of *Metal Gear Solid* and *Xenosaga* are we that we paid the ultimate price for putting the pad down during a couple of cinematics. Thankfully, the kind-hearted people at Capcom have put in checkpoints at the start of most areas as well as the usual selection of save points (which no longer require ink ribbons), making progress a little easier.

But for all the potholes, tricky sections and twists, it's usually the guilty pleasure of popping skulls with the rifle, setting fire to crowds of oncoming enemies or taking down creatures many times your size that keeps you coming back for more. Even when the game draws to a close, extra modes like The Mercenaries cater for your inner sadist by simply throwing enemies at you until time runs out. A selection of characters and stages here ensures that this mode alone will see off hours of your life and that's before you've begun the second playthrough – and you will want to go through the whole wonderful ordeal again. And with the option to either continue with your existing equipment or start anew on the sickeningly difficult Professional mode, not to mention the extra items available second time around, it might not be just the one additional play…

It's hard to find fault with Capcom's latest and most impressive *Resident Evil*, and even when you do, criticisms tend to be petty or cosmetic. You could gripe about Ashley's occasionally iffy path-finding (rather than follow us past a set of bear traps, she went out of her way to set off all three – you go, girl), whine about her lack of speech samples or bemoan the odd graphical glitch. You could, perhaps, speak ill of the fact that enemy models are repeated hundreds of times during the game, and that much of the game is the same 15 minutes of fun repeated. Ultimately, though, every one of these negatives is beaten into submission by a real rarity – an overall package of truly impeccable quality that dazzles in virtually every aspect. Trouble is, those zombies that have lost their heads yet carry on walking are much like the GameCube – how long it can headlessly amble on will depend on just how many games of this outstanding calibre come along.



The rifles are among the most useful tools, especially when scoped up.



You're right. One spinning death blade on a chainsaw isn't enough, is it?

VERDICT 9/10

GRUESOME, STUNNING AND COMPELLING – MAGNIFICENT



Regardless of where you stand on the 'new' *Star Wars* trilogy, this game has all the potential to be awesome. Following in the footsteps of long-standing series like *Rainbow Six*, *Republic Commando* delivers a wholesome first-person squad game with visuals worthy of the *Star Wars* name. A winning formula, surely?

The initial impact is certainly impressive, the level of presentation breathtaking. After you're born (as an elite Clone Trooper) you find yourself on the first level dropping into the thick of the Clone Wars. There's always plenty going on around you and the game doesn't really let up with the action; it's non-stop running and gunning until you reach the game finale surrounded by Wookiees. And that's the biggest problem in *Republic Commando*. Not the big hairy beasts, but the

STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO

JUST ANOTHER CLONE WAR?



Just in case you didn't think of it yourself, the computer tells you that this is a good position to place a man.

action element – it's too much for a tactical shooter. The whole point of having a squad game is that it encourages tactical play; you're supposed to think about your men, where they're at and what they're doing at every moment. It's up to you to hold the team together by building relationships with the computer AI, and learning to appreciate strengths and flaws. Such a simple device is present in pretty much all squad shooters, including the awful *Conflict: Vietnam*, but that's not the case here.

The average mission goes something like this: move to new area, position men, get confronted by wave of enemy robots/bugs, kill, repeat. Don't let the 'position men' part of this equation give you any illusion of tactics or planning either. Each area you enter in the game will have a handful of 'suggested' points to place your men, which are even marked for you on the HUD by way of a handy hologram – all you need to do is aim and click, so when you enter a new area you find yourself merely doing a brief check before rattling the action button to position your Clones.

As you might expect, this action button is context sensitive depending on what you're

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
LucasArts

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
4 March '05

PLAYERS
1-16



games™ CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

ALL WAYS: The game supports split-screen, link-up and online play.

GOT GAME: Multiplayer modes cover the standard deathmatch, team deathmatch and capture the flag.





They may not be the most intimidating enemy but these robots will be the bane of your life.



Your team are fine – just don't ask them to do more than one thing at once…

FAQs

Q. WHERE DO YOU VISIT?
The game takes you on a journey from the Geonosis Arena to the Wookiee home planet of Kashyyyk.

Q. IS THIS BASED AROUND EPISODE III?
No, the story for the game takes place between the second and third films.

Q. SO THERE'S NO EPISODE III STUFF?
Actually there is – you get to fight against General Grievous' pesky bodyguards.

FREE RECOVERY SERVICE

Mess up in this game and you get a second chance. As you drop to the floor, your vision blurred, you're given three options: maintain orders, call and revive, or give up. The first entrusts the rest of your clones to clear the area and then come to you, allowing you to see a groggy version of the combat (something we don't recommend). Select 'call and revive', however, and one of your mates will come and pep you up with a quick health fix. Theoretically, if you don't make an obscene error you shouldn't have too many problems clearing *Republic*.

looking at. Look at a door and you might get a 'breach and clear' option, look at a mission target and you might get a 'plant explosive' command. (Don't get too excited, this isn't far off the full list.) On top of this you can also set up a general ruling that asks your men to scout ahead, hold an area or stick with you. We like the fact that you can split up your men (when the game allows) but the commands are too basic for a squad shooter of this type and, to make matters worse, the game restricts the ways you can use the commands you have.

The first time we saw the hologram on the HUD showing where we could position a man we assumed this was some sort of training aid preparing us for the main event. Surely that can't stay in the game? Not so – it appeared on the last level just as crisp and clear as it did on the first. It's understandable why the developer has chosen to do this, because it does keep the combat fast paced, but you never feel like you're in full control of your team. Thanks to the constant action it's far too easy to lose track of your team. What's so appealing about *Rainbow Six* is the fact that you know you're responsible for the team and you never lose track of them for a second. It's stunning to think that *Republic Commando* has been released so long after the likes of *Black Arrow* and still hasn't picked up any pointers. And you'll have to feel sorry for any multi-tasking gamers…

Hit the action button more than a few times in *Republic Commando* and you're never sure where each man is going or what he's going to do when he gets there. For example, as a general rule, the nearest (or best-trained) Clone will rush to a requested task. However, we lost count of the number of times we heard the game telling us that an action had been cancelled because the action button had been pressed again. Not by mistake either, but because we had tried to order another Clone to a different task. Try to order precise movements of the men and the game rebels, carrying on as it sees fit. Thankfully, the AI is good enough to cover your mistakes when you do get confused. Your men heal themselves when wounded, take cover when needed and actually do decent damage to the enemy forces attacking you, which is more than can be said for some games.

If you go with the flow of how you're supposed to play *Republic Commando* this can be good fun. It is, after all, a *Star Wars* game and, for this reason alone, a small proportion of gamers will enjoy it. But pleasing a small number of gamers hardly sounds like the policy of the kind of republic we'd like to live in…

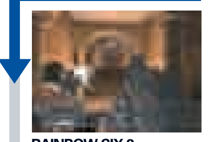
VERDICT 6/10
THIS COULD HAVE BEEN SOMETHING SPECIAL. IT ISN'T.

CONFLICT: VIETNAM



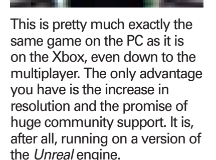
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



RAINBOW SIX 3: BLACK ARROW

PC £39.99



This is pretty much exactly the same game on the PC as it is on the Xbox, even down to the multiplayer. The only advantage you have is the increase in resolution and the promise of huge community support. It is, after all, running on a version of the *Unreal* engine.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Tecmo/Microsoft

DEVELOPER
Team Ninja

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
February '05
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-8 (online)

DEAD OR ALIVE ULTIMATE

WORTH BUYING? ASK YOUR INTERNET CONNECTION

games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
3D FIGHTING ONLINE: The first respectable 3D fighter to be playable online.
ONLINE RANKING: Your skills rated against the best players from all over the world.

D*ead Or Alive 2* was a great game. The first *Dead Or Alive* was also a great game. But are they still great? Many years after the original release of both titles, can they still impress us? Well, in the case of the original, not really, but then, it isn't supposed to – its presence should be treated as a bonus. *DOA2* is different, though. The original Dreamcast version is still beautiful even now, so it's no surprise Team Ninja has decided to use this as the platform for any graphical improvements and gameplay updates in *Ultimate*.

And there are plenty of updates. There are tons of new arenas that do a good job of convincing you you're playing a sequel to *Dead Or Alive 3* rather than the game that came out years before. They're just as interactive as *DOA3*'s, more so in some cases – after all, *DOA3* never gave you the option of fighting in a safari park where you could kick your opponent into hippos and elephants. *DOA Ultimate* does. The characters are also better than before. They look prettier on Xbox and have been given a massive range of colourful, often meticulously detailed and invariably sinister costumes, such as school uniforms and bikinis. New moves have been added, although everything's in essence the same as before with the traditional quick-moving fast-thinking style unchanged.

Dwarfing any cosmetic changes and updates is the introduction of the online mode (included for *DOA1* too). This is *Ultimate*'s reason for being reworked and re-released. This is where the five-year-old Dreamcast game becomes something genuinely new and exciting. Because of the importance of online play (it really is a huge part of the game – in fact, it *is* the game), and the glaringly obvious reason there's no reason for this package to have been released otherwise, it's thankfully not a last-minute bolt-on as happens with so many other games (*Pro Evolution Soccer 4*, we're looking at you); *Ultimate* joins a growing list of games (such as *Halo 2*) where the online mode is the primary concern.

What really makes *DOA Ultimate*'s online play stand out is the unique lobby system, designed to recreate the feel of being sat around with a group of friends at home or in the arcade. The lobby allows eight players to hang out and chat while two players (or four in Tag matches) battle it

Remember, way up in the mountains no-one can hear you scream.



We're not quite sure why we find slamming a girl against a wall so satisfying. But we do.






Most women wouldn't recover from having their heads smacked into the ground like this. Ayane is hard.

out. The actual fighting doesn't separate the group of players – as those fighting get on with the task of slapping each other about, they can hear and talk to everyone else who, until it's their turn to fight, will sit back and watch the action.

This doesn't get dull. Even in a full room, watching the talents of other genuinely skilful players before your go is very useful for picking up regular attack patterns and play styles which you'll then work into your own style, just as it would be if you were sitting around with a group of seven other able players at home. The only time this becomes irritating is if you're locked in a room with people you don't like, which, given the way Xbox Live tends to invite cretinism from American teenagers, can be quite often.

So the game is built well, and the developer has had the right ideas, but actually playing online isn't simple. For us, playing against Americans resulted in frequent lag; lag will cause the frame rate to drop slightly and often isn't a problem in terms of affecting the outcome of your match, unless of course things become really slow, in which case the game is unplayable… and around 90 per cent of our matches against Americans have been unplayable. It's been pretty much fine when playing among ourselves, but then at the time of playing, only journos and a privileged few are using the UK network – who knows what it'll be like when the public is let loose on it. Of course, lag applies to all online games, but it affects one-on-one beat-'em-ups that much more. Considering the distances and networking involved it's amazing it works at all, but even so, the current system is shaky and bandwidth is the one factor affecting whether or not this is worth buying.

Our scores are often debated on internet forums – as one person lets the cat out of the bag, others proceed to comment and disagree without having read the reviews themselves. This will happen again. As people play this and subsequently have wildly different experiences, it's inevitable our score will come under fire – it simply can't apply to everyone. When everything in *Dead Or Alive Ultimate* works, it's worth an eight, possibly even a nine. However, when it doesn't, you're looking at a five. Tell you what, have a seven.

VERDICT 7/10
AS GOOD AS YOUR BROADBAND CONNECTION

FAQs

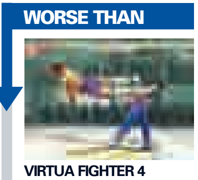
Q. IS HITOMI IN IT?
Despite only being introduced in *DOA3*, Hitomi has made her way to *Ultimate* as a secret character.

Q. DOES IT WORK?
Some of the time, yes. It depends who you want to play against. Stick to people in your own country if you can.

Q. WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE BROADBAND?
Then you'll be paying £40 for an updated version of something already seen on Dreamcast and PS2.

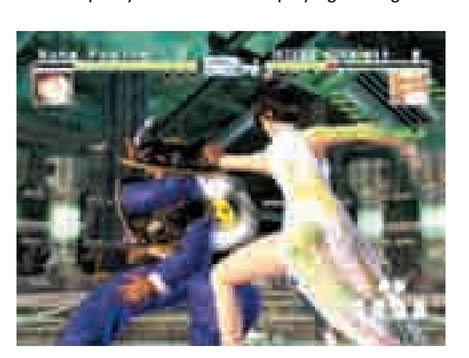
MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION

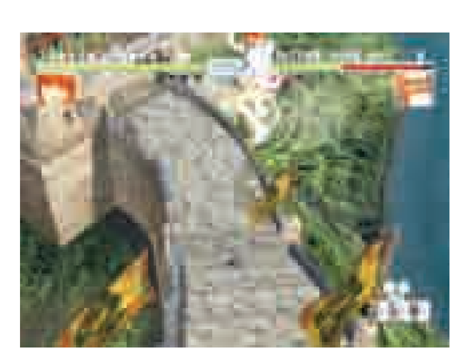
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

VIRTUA FIGHTER 4

PLAYING WITH THE BOYS

Eight people can fit in a lobby and because of this there's the opportunity for the same kind of group play you'd get with a bunch of friends at home. Fortunately, this has not been overlooked, with play modes such as Winner Stays On and Tournament suitably replicating living-room scenarios. It doesn't stop there, though – there's also Loser Stays On (turning the Winner Stays On idea on its head), Kumite (like Winner Stays On except the title of lobby 'daddy' doesn't change hands when the person in the hot seat loses, and the main player chooses the next opponent instead of being in forced to play in order) and Survival (again, like Winner Stays On except it all comes to an end when the chosen 'daddy' stops surviving). As well as these modes, you've also got the choice of playing both four-player tag matches as well as the standard two-player stuff.







The Rush attack can be used every few fights, healing your main character and dealing major damage.



You'd better get used to this screen – you'll be seeing it a lot…

KONAMI'S SEQUEL APPEARS TO BE ALL AT SEA

SUIKODEN IV

With three strong titles under its belt, Konami was always going to be in quite a quandary with the fourth title in the *Suikoden* series. The last game took a slight diversion from the route of its PSone forerunners and, in the process, managed to annoy many long-term fans of the franchise, so any kind of massive shake-up seemed unlikely. Indeed, Konami has taken quite the opposite route and returned to the more traditional formula. Trouble is, by riding on the *Suikoden* staples and failing to elaborate or build on them, this new title is hardly a stunning RPG.

Set long before the events of the first game, Konami's prequel tells the tale of the Rune Of Punishment and our hero's unwanted connection with it. Events unravel at a relatively slow pace but the story remains strong and is arguably one of *Suikoden IV*'s finest areas. But that's always been the case and, as you'll soon discover, this is a game where words like 'usual' and 'standard' will often best describe it. So in true *Suikoden* tradition, you'll soon reach your base of operations – up until now, this has been some kind of castle, but this time you'll be heading out to sea aboard a giant galleon. Much of the game follows this seafaring theme, so as you trawl the massive world map (which is mostly water – lucky you live in a boat, really) there'll be a lot of sailing between remote islands and archipelagos. Herein lies *Suikoden IV*'s primary flaw. With such vast oceans to explore and random encounters kicking in more frequently than can be healthy, getting from A to B can be a frustratingly time-consuming affair.

Battles themselves are as standard as a turn-based combat system can be. Using runes to cast spells, teaming up for combo attacks and converting enemy pain into tiny numbers, it won't be long before you find yourself simply hitting 'auto' to let the computer attack for you just to get through the fights. After seeing some really great real-time systems in recent months (and some well-

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1





FAQs

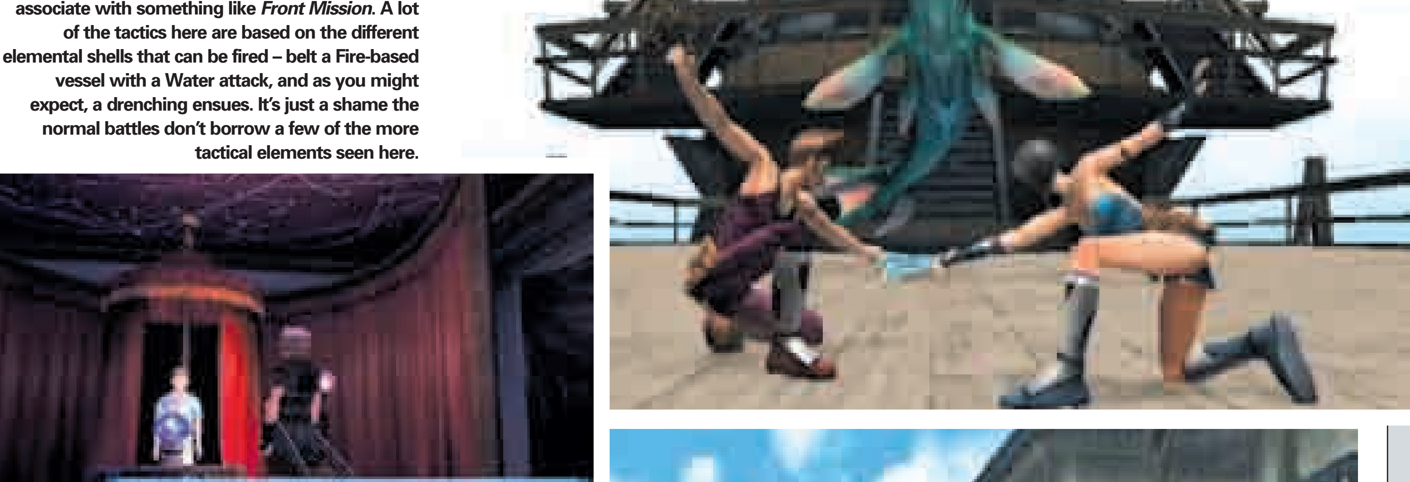
Q. SO HOW LONG IS IT?
You're looking at 30-40 hours plus whatever time you want to spend looking for recruits.

Q. ARE THERE ARMY BATTLES?
The large-scale conflicts now take place at sea and the turn-based naval battles work rather well.

Q. SO WHAT'S WRONG WITH IT?
Much of the game just feels generic or unpolished, not something we'd expect from *Suikoden*.

WORSE THINGS HAPPEN AT SEA…

…Only in this case, that isn't strictly true. The strategic naval battles just happen to be among the finer moments of the game, using a grid system and the usual move/fire mechanics you'd normally associate with something like *Front Mission*. A lot of the tactics here are based on the different elemental shells that can be fired – belt a Fire-based vessel with a Water attack, and as you might expect, a drenching ensues. It's just a shame the normal battles don't borrow a few of the more tactical elements seen here.



Combo abilities are fairly easy to predict, so naturally our two ninjas team up well together.

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

QUARTET: Four fighters take the place of the usual six (or pairs of two in *Suikoden III*).

HIGH SEAS: The prospect of free sailing is unfortunately crushed by the trudging reality.

thought out turn-based systems – *Shadow Hearts: Covenant*, take a bow), this just feels almost too basic to hold attention. Duels retain the same formula as always, requiring you to read between the lines of your opponent's quips to predict their next move then counter it accordingly. While they're rare, duels – and, indeed, sea battles – are always welcome to break up the regular encounters.

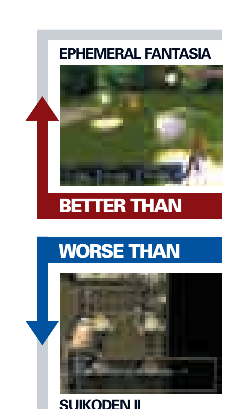
As usual, Konami has made this the Pokémon of the home RPG world – with 108 Stars Of Destiny to track down and recruit, you'll never be short of allies to draft into your four-man squads. You also get to assign a support character, again each possessing unique abilities to help you out. The cast is suitably varied and, as always, you'll quickly warm to several fighters who will be at your side for much of the game. Talking to everyone you meet is the order of the day so every nook and cranny of every location has to be explored (sometimes several times) if you want to find all of the Stars Of Destiny or rare items.

Unfortunately, *Suikoden IV* is as erratic a game as you're likely to find. For every element that works in its favour, another drags it down a little, and this latest offering in the series feels rather dry. For fans of the franchise it's got everything you'd expect on a basic level – outlandish characters, a well-told story and a selection of mini-games and extras – but with little effort to break new ground or extend its appeal outside a crowd familiar with names like Pahn, Gremio and Viktor, *Suikoden IV* simply doesn't seem like a 2005 release. For most players it'll take some commitment to see it through to the end with so many more appealing games coming out right now. While fans will enjoy this on principle, *Suikoden* seems to be a series sadly in decline.



VERDICT 6/10

FAIR RPG THAT LACKS CONSISTENCY



THE KING HAS LEFT THE BUILDING

KOF: MAXIMUM IMPACT

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Ignition Entertainment

DEVELOPER
SNK Playmore

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

Ladies and gentlemen, a cliché: you can't please all of the people, all of the time. But in the case of SNK's attempt to drag the *King Of Fighters* series into the era of next-generation gaming, even one as tired as that isn't entirely accurate. With that in mind, we'd like to offer a revision: you can't please all of the people, all of the time… and that's if you manage to please any of them at all.

Unfortunately, *KOF: Maximum Impact* will be lucky if it does that. Falling awkwardly between two distinctive stools (perhaps during a particularly rough bar fight), the result is an incredibly watered-down 3D beat-'em-up. That's not to say it's not playable – there's a fairly solid system buried underneath the bland veneer that emulates more of the nuances of traditional 2D combat than of 3D. Moving away from the rigid combo lists used by *Mortal Kombat: Deception* or the *Tekken* series, for instance, *Maximum Impact*'s fluid system of juggles and free-form combination attacks does at least allow the player the kind of creativity that many 3D fighters don't allow.

However, there's a mountain of difference between playable and enjoyable, and *Maximum Impact* doesn't even set up base camp, let alone conquer it. That the game has a solid grounding in 2D before adding 3D touches (such as the ability to side-step) cuts it off at the knees – each character's move list is incredibly limited compared to something like *Virtua Fighter*, leaving the game unsure as to what dimension it should be in. The clumsy animation and bland characterisation of what were once vibrant combatants doesn't help either, and although the option to switch the badly acted American voices to Japanese is clearly intended to placate the hardcore contingent, it's not enough to cover up what is obviously an attempt to open up the *KOF* franchise to the graphics-obsessed mass market.

But the gamble hasn't paid off and SNK has created a game that lacks the vibrancy and gimmickry needed to capture such an audience, while leaving dedicated fighting fans crying in agony. No doubt someone will like it… we just don't know who.



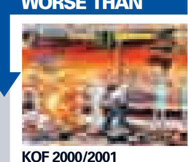
■ Even those with only a paltry knowledge of the *King Of Fighters* series will recognise a few of the faces present… or the bosoms, at least.

STREET FIGHTER EX 3



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



KOF 2000/2001

games™ FUSED

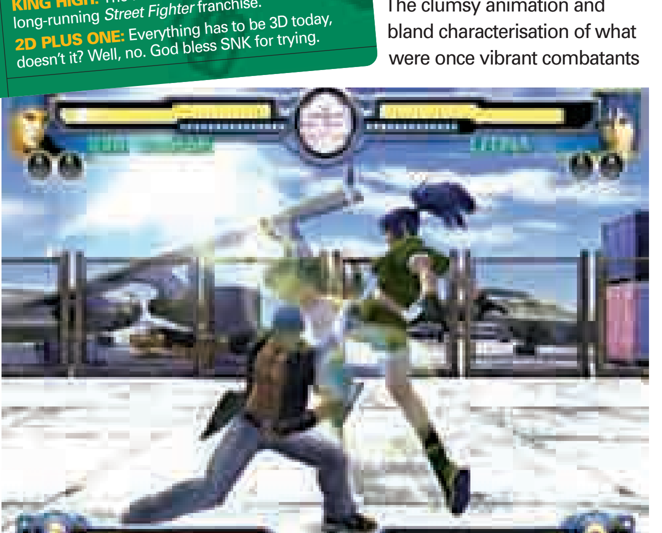
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

KING HIGH: The *KOF* series is as lauded as the long-running *Street Fighter* franchise.

2D PLUS ONE: Everything has to be 3D today, doesn't it? Well, no. God bless SNK for trying.

VERDICT 5/10
NOT BROKEN, JUST WOEFULLY MEDIOCRE

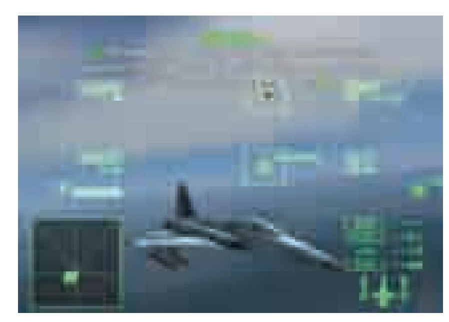
■ Meet Duke, the final boss. He uses the same four moves to dish out a world of pain. Yay.

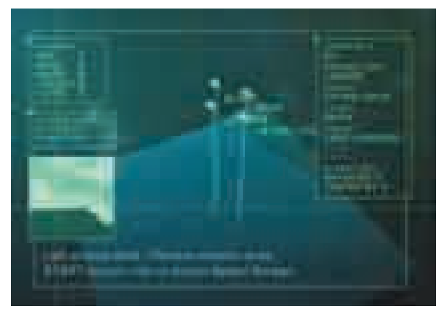





eMag


Most combat takes place at medium range, which explains why we can't see many other fighters right here.


Welcome to the team – soon you'll be able to tell them to attack, deploy or stay in formation. Awesome.


Mission briefings contain words like 'co-ordinates', which is a big turn-on for many lounge-core flyboys.

ACE COMBAT: SQUADRON LEADER

IT DOESN'T TAKE A LOT MORE THAN FANCY FLYING

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
Namco

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

The difference between how jet fighters are appreciated by the casual enthusiast and how they actually handle is clear to any innocent young pup who thought a career in the RAF would be a jolly good laugh until they realised that they'd need a degree in physics and a heart that wouldn't explode at the very smell of a flight of stairs. The renegade pilot myth falsely expounded by Hollywood shatters against interviews with real pilots with Village People moustaches who can't even summon up an ounce of charisma after they've escaped from intrusive interrogation by the Iraqi Republican Guard. It's all a lie. Jets are dull. Thankfully, Namco understands that when people say that it would be cool to fly jet fighters they don't mean they like the idea of being crammed into a cockpit for 20 hours with nothing but some Kendal Mint Cake for company. They want to fight. In jets.

Squadron Leader is the fifth in the *Ace Combat* series and it doesn't expect you to be able to land an F-18 on the deck of an aircraft carrier or take off from a partially bombed runway. It won't make you lose consciousness if you pull too many Gs, and you can climb at a fairly low speed without stalling your kite. In fact, although it features over 50 lovingly recreated jet aircraft of all nationalities as well as individual cockpit models, it doesn't even change the flight characteristics that much. This is the *Ace Combat* way, and it has worked elegantly since early in the life cycle of the PSone. It's about arcade aerial combat manoeuvres and has as much to do with the real exploits of modern pilots as the PC's classic *X-Wing* series. Look at the PlayStation2's DualShock and you'll see that the lack of hundreds of buttons makes this a very good thing.

Setting the game in an alternative universe makes all this simplicity seem perfectly natural. And it means that you can be afforded impressively Earth-like landscapes that sharpen the cutting edge of photorealistic graphics with suitable differences in texture and slick performance while fighting off a swarm of Mig-29s in an A-10 Tankbuster. This should be nonsense, but the otherworldly nature of the


The landscapes are never less than quite pretty. Here Somerset has been recreated down to a Mendip.

FAQs

Q. IS IT A BIT LIKE TOP GUN?
Yes, it even features a pilot who doesn't fly by the rules.

Q. ANY NEED FOR FLARES AND CHAFF?
No, all missiles can simply be out-flown with aerial acrobatics.

Q. DOES IT FEATURE MUSIC BY PUDDLE OF MUDD?
Alas, yes. Even in the future and in an alternate universe musical taste on airbases is retarded.



That missile costs more than this journalist earns in three years.

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

RIDE MY TAIL: This instalment in the series features squadron commands.

DISH DELISH: More sumptuous graphics than ever make this look real purty.

TELLING STORIES OUT OF CLASS

As coke-bent movie producer Don Simpson would tell you (if he weren't dead), strapping a worthy story to a basic tale of iron birds and missiles is easy, though that didn't stop the previous *Ace Combat* from trying to be clever by telling the tale from the viewpoint of an observer located far from the action. This narrative trick used subtle two-dimensional animation and still imagery to give a calm break between combat and a reflective feel to the tale. Well, not any more. The narrator is actually a pilot this time, and the cut-scenes go balls out for impressive CGI and a rock soundtrack (well, Puddle of Mudd at least). The questionable voice-acting talent and clichéd stock characters work, however. It's cheese, but the expensive stuff that makes your fridge smell of teenage feet.

locations and simplistic politics of the storyline make such engagements seem perfectly rational, and undeniably something to be savoured.

Indeed, although there's not as great a leap in graphical quality as there was between *Ace Combat*s *3* and *4* – which was more a hardware architecture leap, after all – the verisimilitude of your surroundings has never been higher. Special note must go to the depth and consistency of clouds and missile trails, while sceptics will be happy to be reminded that, yes, should you fly low then the illusion is made known by necessarily noticeable pixels, and the detonation of targets be they in air, on land or in the sea is vaguely reminiscent of Sega's *Space Harrier*, but only in contrast to the sheer beauty of the mountains, rivers and sparkling bays that define the majority of the combat zone.

You can have a world-class stage, but unless the play is worth watching then all is in vain. So we come to the invention found in *Squadron Leader*'s mission structure. Not only does it manage to get the most from vehicles that are only meant to fly from A to B and kill C, it constantly throws surprises at you mid-mission. This sense of flying in a transforming situation is amplified by the constant chatter of the other members of your squadron, as well as intercepted messages from the enemy. It's all about 'being there' and this is where the 'Leader' aspect of the title comes into play. You can issue commands to your wingmen via the D-pad. Nothing too fancy, you understand. And if we were to be brutal we'd mention that although your fellow pilots can take care of themselves with skill, you rarely feel like you've had the benefit of their company beyond the way they occupy the enemy's time and gun sights. But their aptitude will increase along with your own, and on later



This manoeuvre is called the 'climb'. Funny that.

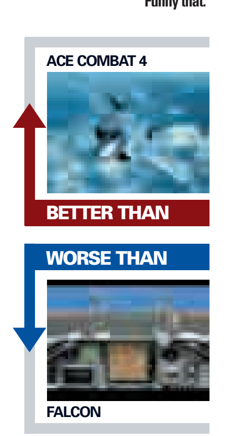
missions your squadron will perform with more deadly accuracy whether you thumb out orders or not.

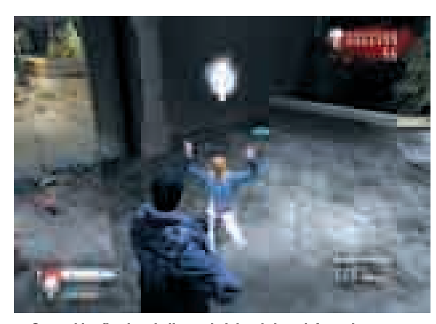
There's no doubt that this is the finest craft in the *Ace Combat* hangar, which effectively makes it the finest flight combat game available on the PlayStation2. Perfect control, sound effects that make the best of Dolby stereo, and combat that imbues the player with a genuine sense of urgency without sacrificing fun. And we didn't even rely on any quotes from *Top Gun*. Gooooooose!



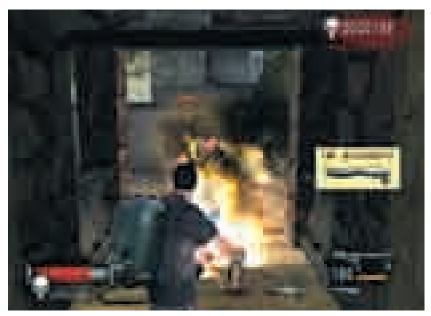
VERDICT 8/10

THERE'S NO BETTER WAY TO MAKE YOUR PS2 FLY





Guys with a floating skull over their heads have information you can beat out of them. Go on – give him the old 'bap, bap, BAP!'.



There are loads of big weapons to unlock, in true *Hitman* style, by leaving a level with one of them. We like setting people on fire.



Apparently, Frank is a big, ahem, fan of this screenshot. Sorry. It's not called *The Pun-isher* for nothing, you know…

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

DEATH BY DEGREES: 'Escort' foes to certain points to trigger trademark kills and interrogations.

REAL TIME?: Considering the style, there's not nearly enough bullet time for our liking.

THE PUNISHER

"I'M GOING TO PULL YOUR HEAD OFF, BECAUSE I DON'T LIKE YOUR HEAD"

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
THQ

DEVELOPER
Volition

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
April '05

PLAYERS
1

Poor Volition. If you're trying to create a game that involves a man running around shooting other men, chances are you're going to have a hard time making it feel fresh. Even on a basic level, comparisons to *Max Payne* were going to be inevitable. But to make matters worse, the game's presentation doesn't do a thing to distance it from Take 2's series: this revenge-driven game starts at the end and is played out in flashback form, complete with poignant monologue from anti-hero Frank Castle. The action itself is solid enough, adding quick kills, interrogations (which are the only way to restore The Punisher's health) and some lovely set pieces to the expected dives and firefights. Snappy one-liners (indeed, dialogue in general) are wonderfully penned and delivered in a suitably cold manner, and this interaction really adds to the satisfaction of slaughter. Score one for Volition, then.

That said, there are some very odd issues with *The Punisher*. For one, the game feels the need to cut to black-and-white and adopt subtler camera angles for all the situation kills, whether it's the understandable pillar-drill-through-head or the rather less gruesome man-falling-a-few-metres-onto-boxes. Still, with the 18 certificate sitting so proudly on the front of the box, it's a little strange to discover that it's more conceptual than actual violence earning a BBFC rating. In reality, the little spurts of ketchup and almost bullet-proof skulls pale in comparison to games like *Soldier Of Fortune* and even the 15-rated bloodbath that is *Resident Evil 4*. For a comic-book game so clearly geared around its malevolence, much of the realisation simply doesn't do the imagination and pure gritty violence justice.

Another anomaly is the fact that killing enemies in style after an interrogation loses points (despite the fact that reeling them back in and quickly blasting them in the face earns points), but despite these quirks *The Punisher* does exactly what it sets out to do. Picking up the controller gives immediate access to a theatre of death and destruction, and while originality is gunned down at some point during the first few levels, there's plenty of fun to be had, especially for fans of the comic. Given the potential of the licence, though, it's just a shame so much of the game feels so 'by numbers'.



VERDICT 6/10
ENJOYABLE FARE THAT MISSES THE MARK SOMEWHAT

DEAD TO RIGHTS



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



MAX PAYNE 2

PS2 £39.99



You know what to expect by now – slightly lower-quality visuals and the lack of 5.1 audio aside, you'll be dishing out punishment just the same


eMag

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Activision

DEVELOPER
Pandemic

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

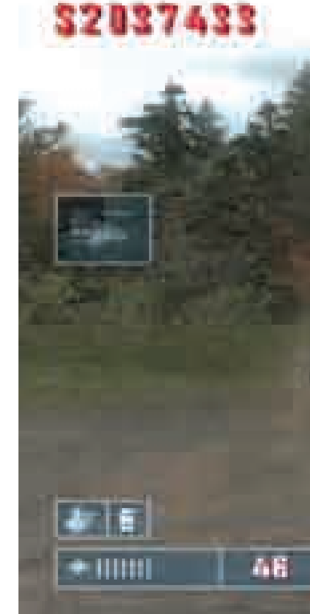
MERCENARIES

A GAME THAT DOESN'T GET OUT OF BED FOR LESS THAN TEN BIG ONES

Explosions are, we're told, a very good thing in a videogame. Theoretically, then, the higher the number of explosions and the more intense their ferocity, the better things should get – indeed, this reviewer recalls one conversation where a PR colleague insisted that his game get a higher score simply because the explosions in it were 'amazing'. We disagreed. Why? Probably because all the rampaging fireballs in the world can't hide a shallow game's inadequacies. Several months later we now find ourselves with the same dilemma: do a multitude of explosions make a shallow game great? The answer is still no.

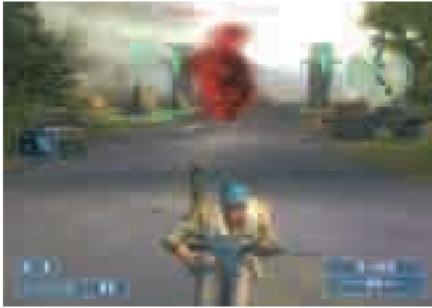
At this point you probably think we don't like *Mercenaries*, but you're wrong. While only the blindest of mice could fail to see its flaws, Pandemic's latest effort is actually rather fun and manages to offer a level of satisfaction we've not seen in a game for a while. This is, of course, purely down to the flexibility the game offers when it comes to unadulterated carnage. Dropped into two sprawling maps of South Korea, you really can go anywhere and destroy anything as long as you have sufficient firepower to do so. In the case of vehicles, small buildings and guard towers, you need as little as a block of C4; bigger targets and you're talking multiple strikes from your basic weapons, a few shells from nearby artillery if it's available or, if you can afford it, one of the many air strikes that become an option. Regardless of what you use, though, the result is the same: a huge shower of flame, metal and rubble as your target crumbles to the ground, and a hugely satisfying sense of accomplishment on your part. Without a doubt, destroying things in *Mercenaries* sure is fun and, not surprisingly, getting to do so makes up the majority of the gameplay. Lucky us.

What isn't so fortunate is how easy it is to look past the genuinely impressive explosions and see just how rudimentary the rest of the game is. Despite all the promises, *Mercenaries* isn't so much a freeform action adventure as it is an explosion-coated treasure hunt, laden with clues so obvious that they all but place neon-coloured idiot markers over the abundant booty. In principle, the key goal of hunting down the Deck of 52 (the leaders of North Korea's invading army) is sound thanks to the expansive map and subsequently large amount of legwork needed in order to find them all. The actuality is rather less demanding: drive within the general vicinity of a carded target location and

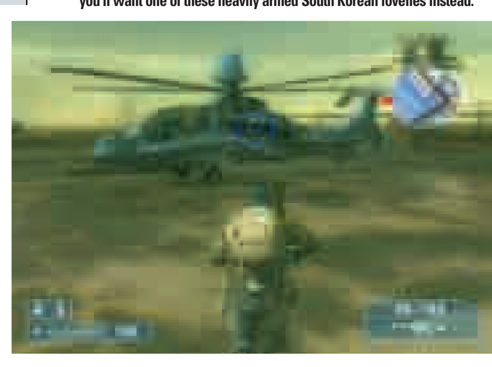


Never call in air support if you haven't destroyed the nearby missile launchers first. Oops.

Chinese artillery isn't accurate, but can be good for decimating a wide area.



Allied helicopters are nice but if you really want to make an impact you'll want one of these heavily armed South Korean lovelies instead.







'ping!', they appear on your radar. That's it. No long-range scouting, no hiding in the undergrowth – just a huge green arrow hovering over your target's head, turning their already easy capture (thanks to the unresponsive AI) into one big barrel/ fish analogy. The same goes for the missions required to gain location intel on targets in the first place; painting mission goals with glowing yellow markers only increases the feeling of idiot-proofing (although it does come in useful considering the horrible amount of fogging, especially when attacking from the air, as you can usually see the markers before the actual target even appears).

Other elements of the game are so undeveloped it hurts. For instance, the Respect system showing you how well you get on with each faction, borrowed as it is from *GTA2*, doesn't really mean much when all it takes to stop hostile troops from attacking you is a small bribe in the right pocket. You almost want it to steal more from Rockstar's series, with factions sending in more powerful troops according to how aggressive you are (à la *GTA*'s Wanted rating), rather than the weak get-out clause the game offers instead. But the whole problem with *Mercenaries* is that you wish it could offer more on every front – there are far too many missed opportunities to make it any more than competent.

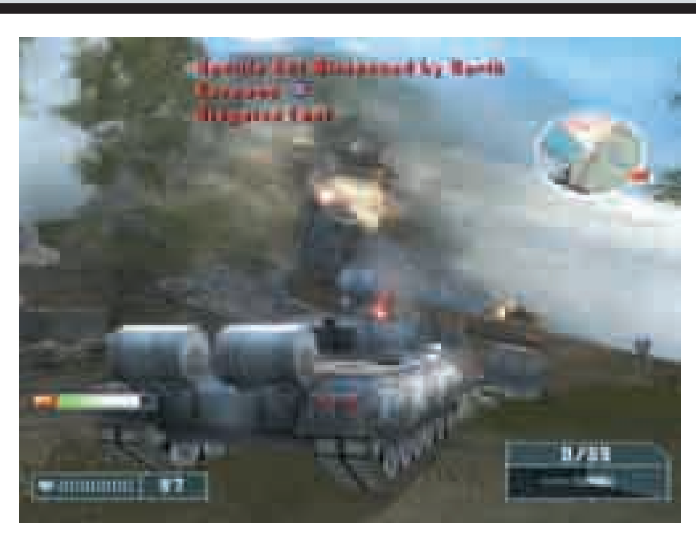
Mercenaries isn't a complicated example of military precision, requiring all the stealth, skill and guile of today's modern soldier; it's an arcade blast-fest where the biggest gun always wins and the old saying about 'shoot first, shoot later, shoot some more and then when everybody's dead, ask a question or two' couldn't be more suited. Explosions certainly are fun, to a point, but when that point is all a game has to offer we just can't help wanting something else.

FAQs

Q. GREAT EXPLOSIONS?
Certainly. Pandemic has managed to create what could very well be The Best Explosions Ever™.

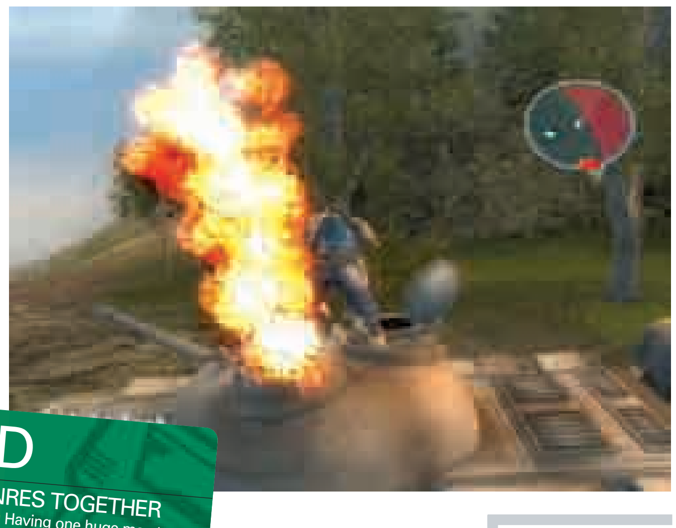
Q. WHAT'S WRONG?
Probably that the explosions hide such a by-the-numbers game; rather than actively seeking stuff out, you just go where you're told.

Q. ANYTHING ELSE?
What, besides the incredibly long loading times between missions and the horrible combination of intense fogging and close-range pop-up? No, not really.



HAIL TO THE CHIEF

Wanton destruction is all very well, but players with an eye for detail will know that sometimes it's the smaller things that pay off the most. In *Mercenaries*' case, that means looking out for key targets to destroy – specifically, annoyingly small radar-shaped listening posts and Stalin-esque statues – as well as suspiciously marked boxes containing blueprints and valuable items to collect. The more targets you achieve, the better the reward in the form of new additions to your support options such as vehicles and air strikes. Rewards aside though, you have to wonder… does scouring the open countryside in thick fog looking for hard-to-see objects really count as fun?



games™

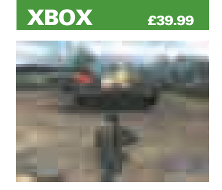
FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

WIDE OPEN SPACE: Having one huge map to explore works in the case of *Mercenaries.*

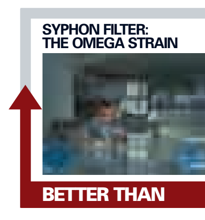
BIG BANG THEORY: But the emphasis is as much on blowing things up as it is exploring.

XBOX £39.99



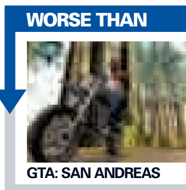
Sleeker visuals (although no reduction in the fogging), a smoother frame rate and some slightly better loading times – just what you'd expect from the Xbox.

SYPHON FILTER: THE OMEGA STRAIN



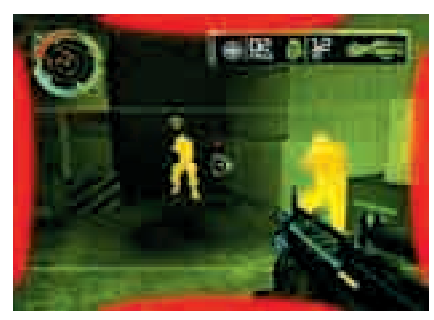
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

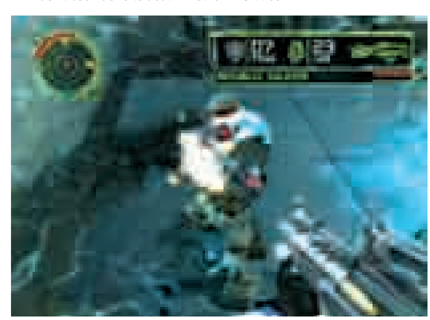


GTA: SAN ANDREAS

VERDICT 6/10
EXPLOSIVE ACTION THAT'S GENERALLY PUDDLE-DEEP



Enhanced vision is handy when the lights go out, but it's nothing that hasn't been done to death in other FPS titles.





Ammo is plentiful, so you'll never be without your shotgun… though your bare fist is just as powerful.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
Crystal Dynamics

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (2-16 Online)

MORE SNOWBLAND THAN SNOWBLIND

PROJECT: SNOWBLIND

Playing through *Project: Snowblind,* it's not hard to imagine the events that led to the game's conception. The meetings, brainstorming and no doubt the buzz of excitement… it's a vivid image. Unfortunately, the difference between what Crystal Dynamics wanted to do with *Snowblind* and the finished product is a crevasse that good intentions fall well short of bridging, leaving the game lying in a Wile E. Coyote-style cloud of dust at the bottom.

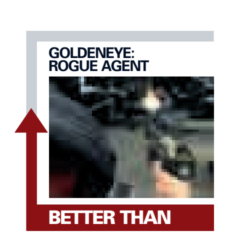
Though it sounds fine on paper, *Snowblind* is awash with good ideas that are either unfinished, unrefined or just left to one side. For instance, offering an extensive range of weaponry – including pistols, shotguns, machine guns, sniper rifles, plasma rifles and even the almighty railgun – with their own primary and secondary fire modes is all very well. However, when the most powerful weapon in the game is your fist (a single punch knocks out all but one type of enemy) and the entire game can be completed using that, the shotgun and the sniper rifle, any desire to explore the need for extra guns is negated.

The horribly linear level design ('multiple routes' through each stage turn out to be minor diversions) and the fact that the mission structure requires little thought don't help matters. Objectives are simply a case of hitting the right checkpoints or interacting with a computer on a wall – which, seeing as you're hacking in, should perhaps require some kind of puzzle instead of just being able to choose an option like 'Override AI' from a menu – and entire chunks of levels often appear to be missing, as cut-scenes whisk you from one location to the next without any need for action on your part.

Even the biological modifications go to waste, with only one – a shield that makes you invincible for a limited period – proving of any use. In this respect, we were hoping for *Deus Ex* but what we got was more like *Rogue Agent*. Admittedly, *Snowblind* isn't as bad as EA's atrocity, but a complete lack of passion or excitement from start to finish mean it's hardly the vision of the future we expected.

VERDICT 5/10
A MISSED OPPORTUNITY ON EVERY LEVEL

GOLDENEYE: ROGUE AGENT



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



KILLZONE

XBOX/PC £39.99/£29.99



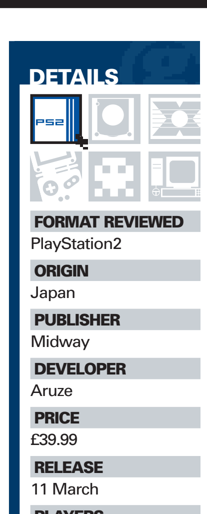
Strangely, the PC and Xbox versions are virtually identical to the PS2 one – there's very little improvement in visuals and loading times, which is rather disappointing.

games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE



MOD ME DO: You can take *Snowblind* online to play against up to 16 friends. Despite the addition of Bio-mods, though, it's standard fare and does little to spice up what is otherwise a mediocre shooter.


eMag



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Midway

DEVELOPER
Aruze

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
11 March

PLAYERS
1

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE MAD TO WORK HERE…

SHADOW HEARTS: COVENANT

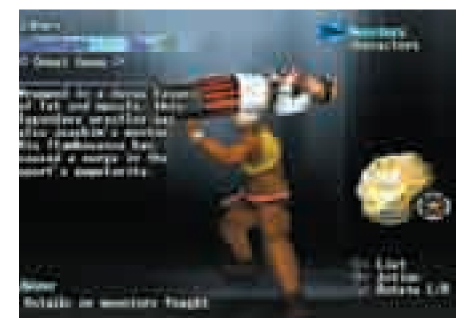
In RPGs, arguably more than any other genre, it's terrifyingly simple for a game to be formulaic. We've all played something that goes a little like this: generic hero A has to save planet B by fighting off really, really evil villain C (and all his/her/its cronies), possibly rescuing princess D in the process. The idea that there are seven basic plots that run throughout all media is just as true with games as well as books or films, so it's not the basics that worry but the handling thereof. Yet while the world around Aruze seems content to follow our sample plot to the letter, this developer has managed to twist it so much it now resembles a crude yet awesome balloon dog. Main characters that fuse with gods and demons? The entire battle system being played by a character? Giant pink cats as bosses? *Shadow Hearts: Covenant* is anything but your average RPG…

We seldom, if ever, see a cast of characters this diverse. It all starts out a little generic – spiky-haired, angsty teens and buxom heroines abound – but the lunacy soon kicks in and *Covenant* becomes as mental as Geoff Capes would get if you messed with his budgies. A semi-retired puppeteer who exchanges gay porn trading cards for new abilities; a pro-wrestling vampire superhero whose biorhythm determines his form in battle; a snooty Russian princess who attacks with a mystic egg and can summon creatures from photographs… Your party plays host to all manner of freaks as well some marginally saner characters and the game quickly builds a character for each of them – you'll easily find favourites and establish a posse but it can be hard choosing who to leave out. With eight characters, certain sections will make you use two parties of four, meaning that while it may be time consuming, building up everyone fairly equally is your best chance for success.

Behind every great RPG is a great battle system and *Shadow Hearts 2* is lucky enough to sport just that. In principle, the Judgment Ring might seem like a slightly cheap way of simulating involvement in the action but in fact it's completely the opposite. Forcing the player to hit certain areas as the needle races around the Ring does a great job of bridging the gap between real-time and turn-based battles. A simple attack chain might only require a couple of hits while a devastating ability will have three or four sections that must be hit before the move even works. As well as slim bonus areas at the end of many of the sections of the Ring that will increase the



Mess up any part of a combo and chances are you'll miss out several turns.



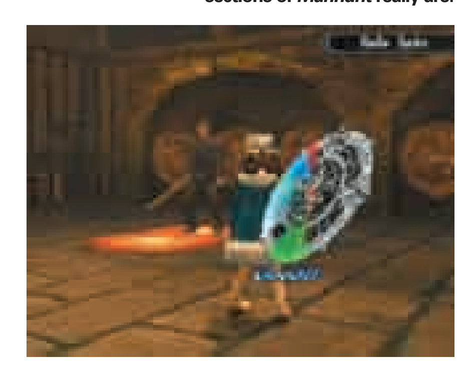
Anyone who hits opponents with a giant model pirate is okay by us.

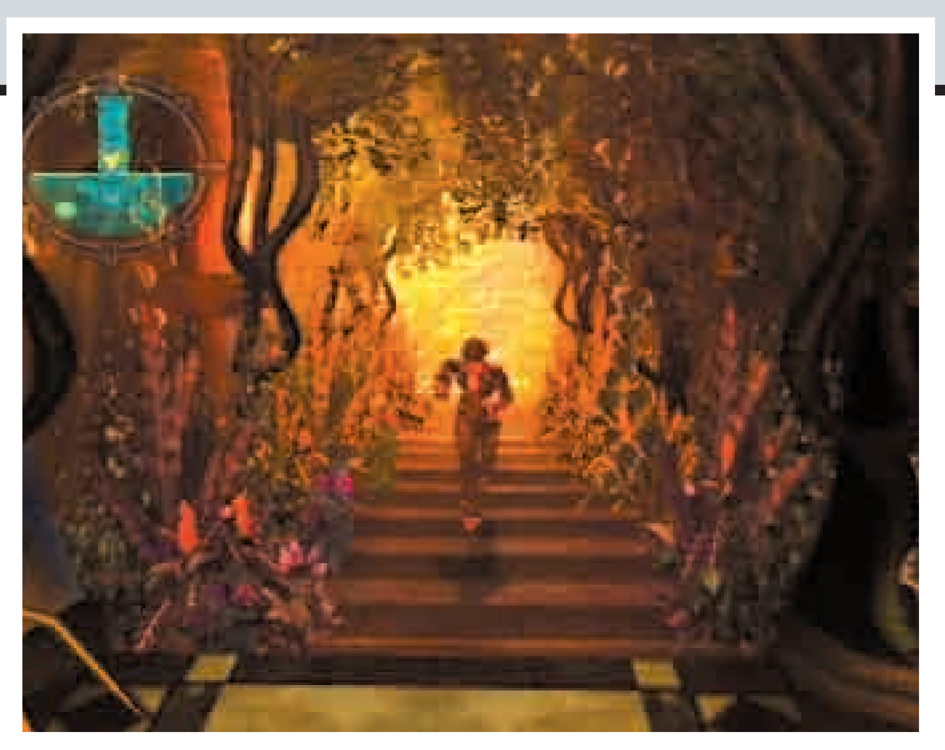
Yuri's Fusion Monsters can be powered up with the souls of fallen enemies. Dark.



CRY WOLF

Blanca, the white wolf of the party, provides one of the most amusing sections of the game. In order to break the rest of your party out of jail, Blanca must sneak around the castle in an obvious homage to Mr Solid Snake. Seeing a huge wolf pressed up against a wall and hiding in shadows is an absolute sight to behold, and even though it's a bit of a joke, the mechanics still hold their own and serve to showcase just how ropey the stealth sections of *Manhunt* really are.





effectiveness of your moves, you're able to customise the Ring as you see fit or risk several attacks to cue up a powerful combo move. Items allow you to add more attacks, build up areas or use entirely different Rings altogether and certain accessories can slow the spinning, making a perfect rotation that much more likely.

Outside battle, the Judgment Ring still plays a part (albeit a lesser one), allowing discounts and mark-ups in shops as well as governing things like the lottery. But even when the Ring isn't involved, things are no less interesting. The narrative is as refreshing as the touches of humour and the off-the-wall approach – set during the First World War, the plot combines elements of reality with all manner of black magic, rituals and sorcery to create some excellent 'what could have been' situations. Bound together with plenty of well-acted and even-better-scripted cut-scenes, the game throws situation after situation at you and even though it seems like you're reaching a conclusion by the end of the first disc, things quickly spiral back into confusion. Indeed, your journey takes you around the world in search of peace and a solution to protagonist Yuri's debilitating condition.

Whether it's the variety between characters and the way they're built up, the well-told story and diverse settings, or simply the bravery to be an RPG so different to anything else out there, you have to respect *Shadow Hearts 2*. It may not have the length, profile or production values of Square Enix's insanely epic triple-A output but through charm, wit and willingness to not only step but throw itself outside the traditional boundaries of the genre, *Covenant* most definitely prevails. You'll see and hear a lot of things your senses weren't prepared for and revisiting a more traditional RPG afterwards is like walking out after an all-night party and going straight to the local library. The fundamentals of a classic RPG will most likely stop this infiltrating the ranks of the masses but if you've grown tired of the constant stream of *Final Fantasy* wannabes, we urge you to let Midway show you that a little imagination really does go a long way.



Blanca gains and enhances skills by participating in the Wolf Bout street-fighting competition.



VERDICT 8/10

A WONDERFULLY PLEASANT AND REFRESHING SURPRISE

FAQs

Q. HOW LONG IS IT?
Forty-odd hours stretched over two discs. It's no epic but it'll certainly keep you going.

Q. GOOD MUSIC?
Nothing mind-blowing but the whole score (primarily orchestral) never dips below decent.

Q. BEST CHARACTER?
Joaquim, by a stretch. His overblown heroic rants, shoe-size IQ and booming voice never fail to amuse.

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

IMMERSION: Rendered backdrops are out, the full three dimensions are in.

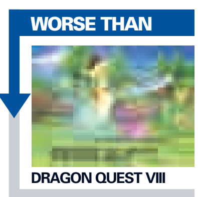
ROFL: The characters and humour really give *Covenant* a unique feel.

FINAL FANTASY X-2



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



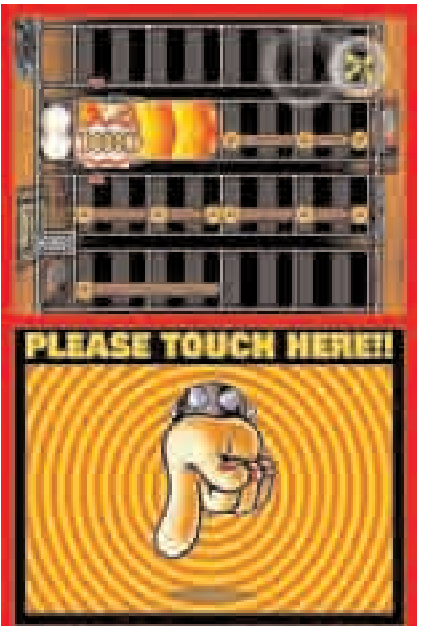
DRAGON QUEST VIII



Unless you're prepared for some trial and error, the reams of Japanese text may mean you're better off waiting for a UK release.



Sadly, the record on the bottom screen can't be used for scratching, so wannabe DJs may want to look elsewhere.



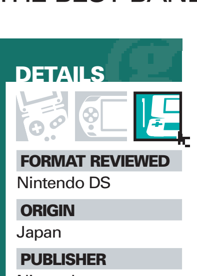
A simple press of the touch screen will trigger a complex pattern that will have you flailing like a goon.

DAIGASSO! BAND BROTHERS

THE BEST BAND BROTHERS SINCE THE BEE GEES



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
¥4,800

RELEASE
TBA (Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-8

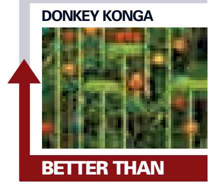
It's ironic to think that one of the DS's least talked about launch titles also happens to be one of its best. Overlooked in favour of crowd pleasers such as *Super Mario 64 DS* and *Sawaru! Made In Mario*, *Band Brothers* is an utterly engrossing title that perfectly showcases the DS's abilities, while letting you live out deranged fantasies of world tours and groupies. Sort of.

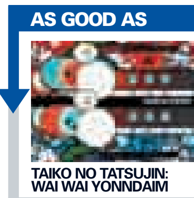
Like many rhythm action games, *Band Brothers* lures you in gently – a press of the D-pad here, a touch of the lower screen there – before building into a frenzy of button action. While Beginner and Amateur modes are fairly straightforward, having you 'play along' with songs by tapping buttons, Pro mode takes an age to master. In this sense, *Band Brothers* is rather like learning a real instrument; only the very skilled can expect to make headway without practising, so most mortal gamers will spend a lot of time rehearsing. However, with 32 songs, as well as the ability to create your own tunes (via notation or the DS's mic), you won't find the constant practising too much of a hardship (though those who wish to use Pro Edit mode may want to wait for a PAL release due to the vast amounts of Japanese text).

Although little more than a rhythm action game at heart, *Band Brothers* takes a step in a new and exciting direction, mainly because of the DS's ability to upload its software to any available DSs. As a result, up to eight players can play a separate instrument on each song via one game cartridge, and once arguments over lead guitar have been settled the true capabilities of *Band Brothers* are fully realised. True to its Japanese roots, *Band Brothers* features an eclectic range of music and among the expected J-pop you'll find Deep Purple, orchestral classics and Nintendo remixes. Granted, the midi compositions sound a little old-school, but that's to be expected considering the sonic limitations of the DS.

With the likes of *Donkey Konga* proving enjoyable, if limited, experiences, it's good to see Nintendo take the rhythm action game firmly by the horns and deliver a communal gaming experience that's quite unlike any other.








eMag

THE ROBOTS RISE AGAIN

NANOBREAKER



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
February '05

PLAYERS
1

When dealing with a third-person action game that's had *Castlevania* producer Koji Igarashi on the team, you have a reasonably good idea of what's coming: eerie piano-based music, a sinister plot and monsters at every turn. But something we weren't expecting was the blood.

We're not a squeamish lot – we find a bit of gore in a game usually achieves the desired effect if used correctly – but this isn't what we're talking about here. Fountains of the stuff pour from every biomechanical enemy that wanders into the path of your combos, turning every area into a grotesque picture of torn bodies and claret. Well, almost. Thanks to said blood being in the rarely seen solid strip form, the enemies you butcher actually just resemble weird, red shrubs for a moment then hit the floor, leaving their ex-contents all over the place. You can expect to see this after every manouevre, not to mention a comedy amount of gore that's actually about as funny as one of those squirty lapel flowers. We found it a bit annoying.

Saving the game from being nothing more than a rudimentary lesson in button-mashing is the combat system. Although the range of attacks is limited at first, once you manage to plough through the first couple of areas you'll have found enough Combo Chips to really start dealing out damage with style. These Combo Chips can be inserted into various positions on your combo flow-chart, and where you choose to place them will affect the moves you have available. Chips can be swapped at any time and you can openly experiment until you've found what you think is the best set of combos for a player of your type. Eventually it's possible to be throwing out eight buttons' worth of combo at enemies, concluding with a giant, glowing scythe (or various other sharp objects) hacking opponents in two. It's good stuff, but not good enough to keep you playing for long without having to stifle a few yawns.

What you're looking at here is your standard hack-and-slash adventure that's been brightened up with some impressive visuals. After a couple of hours' play your right thumb will be in a fairly bad state and your left not faring much better. There are those who would swear by this ageing game formula – and to these people *Nanobreaker* will offer plenty – but if you're not of this view then we advise you think carefully before you make a purchase.

VERDICT 5/10
AS GENERIC AS YOU CAN GET

HUNTER: THE RECKONING



BETTER THAN

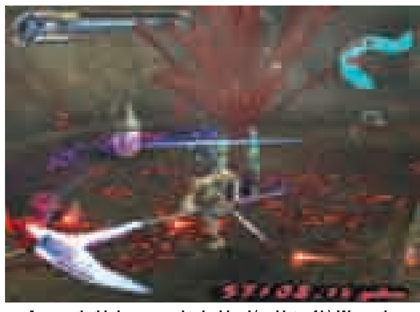
WORSE THAN



NINJA GAIDEN

Although you can't turn the blood off, you can change its colour. Here we show the lovely mixed colour option.





Apparently this is supposed to be blood (and lots of it). We, on the other hand, think he looks like a tree.

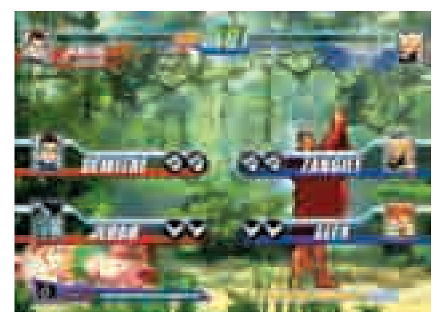



eMag

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
MIX AND MATCH: *Jam* features characters from five Capcom beat-'em-ups, all with their own style.
SWITCH-A-ROO: Once you've picked two fighters, you can switch between them after each round.



Now that's what we call a mismatched bundle of faces – so many fighting styles and yet none of them seem to fit together.



Being able to switch characters out between rounds is a nice touch.



The *Street Fighter II* characters get the disadvantage of having no way of countering airborne moves. Hardly seems fair, does it?

CAPCOM FIGHTING JAM

ALL THE FRUIT BUT NONE OF THE FLAVOUR

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2
OTHER FORMATS
Xbox
ORIGIN
Japan
PUBLISHER
Capcom
DEVELOPER
In-House
PRICE
£19.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1-2

Would you consider us old-fashioned if we said that the most played games in the games™ office were 2D Capcom beat-'em-ups? Hopefully, you're a little more open-minded than that. Nevertheless, we've recently managed to find more hours of fun in titles like Xbox *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* and PSP *Vampire Chronicle* than most other games put together – proof that Capcom's continued support of 2D gaming is more than valid.

Theoretically, then, *Capcom Fighting Jam* should be a beat-'em-up fan's dream, particularly because it goes down the route of *Capcom Vs SNK* and *Marvel Vs Capcom* – both good-quality fighters – to bring some of the most popular combatants together in a single game. However, what you wish for isn't always what's good for you… According to producer Yoshi Ono this game is a direct result of the Capcom listening to the fans, yet it features so many unlikely partnerships and flawed mechanics that it's hard to imagine any fan asking for something like this.

It's almost as though *Jam* can't decide what kind of fighting game it wants to be, thanks to a dramatic clash of styles in terms of both combat and visuals. There's a complete lack of balance, not only because some of the styles (*Red Earth* and *Street Fighter II* particularly) are weaker than others, but also because the choice of fighters is rather haphazard: Urien from *SFIII* over Dudley? *Darkstalkers*' Anakaris rather than Morrigan or Talbain? No Ken? A strange selection, to say the least. Many characters have also been 'tweaked', which spoils things further. Some moves have been unnecessarily clipped or censored (such as Demitri's Midnight Bliss), others have been removed completely (*SFIII*'s Alex loses his flying DDT, for example) and various timings, particularly on the parry abilities of the *SFIII* characters and the *Darkstalkers* combos, have changed enough to make things difficult for dedicated players.

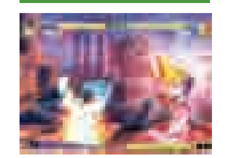
Because of this, *Jam* just feels messy instead of satisfying, the kind of messy that only serves to fuel the arguments of pro-3D gamers. That this completely new effort can't even compete against Capcom's other recent 2D releases, both of which are based on games that are at least eight years old, is the most worrying thought, though – especially if, like us, you're hoping that a high-res *Street Fighter IV* is just around the corner.

VERDICT 4/10
A SHOCKINGLY LACKLUSTRE AND SCRAPPY EFFORT

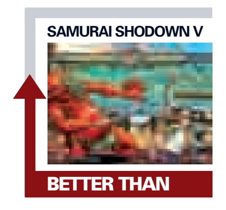
XBOX £19.99

Again, Capcom has added online play to the Xbox version, due out not long after the PS2 game. Against *SFIII: 3rd Strike* though, it's just not the same.

BETTER THAN
SAMURAI SHODOWN V



WORSE THAN
SF: ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION




eMag


The basics are explained thanks to a series of hyperlinked menus.


Any decent aspiring Pharaoh will want to build a few monuments.


A royal walkabout is an excellent way to meet the people.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Sega

DEVELOPER
Tilted Mill

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium III or Athlon 800 MHz processor, 128Mb of RAM (256Mb for Windows XP), 800Mb hard drive space

WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN, AND GENERALLY LIVE LIKE ONE TOO

IMMORTAL CITIES: CHILDREN OF THE NILE

Although this is developer Tilted Mill's first game, we knew pretty much what to expect. Staffed by former Impressions workers who had been involved with the development of *Pharaoh*, it's clear where the inspiration for the company's first title came from – but this is more than just a *Pharaoh* clone.

The city-building genre has been crying out for a boost, which is what *Children Of The Nile* delivers. Unlike many games of this ilk, it caters for both micro- and macro-management, allowing for a series of small challenges to take place within a much bigger story arc. The game follows a line of Pharoahs through the era when Egypt was the most influential civilisation in the world. Each Pharoah will die and be replaced by another, and the main goal for each ruler is to make it into the afterlife by ensuring that they have plenty of prestige at the time of their death. If the player succeeds in doing this, the next Pharaoh will be able to control more citizens, allowing the civilisation to grow yet further. This mixture of short-term goals to aid the long-term objective of growth works very well, catering both for those who enjoy epic, sandbox city improvements as well as those who like to have something immediate to work towards.

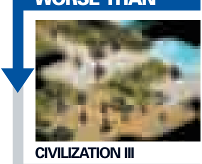
Everything is easy enough to get to grips with thanks to a well-laid out interface, although the complexity of the game makes the tutorial missions an absolute necessity, and having the manual close at hand is also a good idea for those first tentative steps towards immortality. The only real disappointment is the visuals. The 3D engine doesn't allow for much in the way of texturing and as a result the various monuments and buildings that can be constructed look very stark indeed, even when compared to their counterparts in the ageing *Pharaoh*. Admittedly *Children Of The Nile* is a game that will sell itself on the gameplay, but that doesn't mean it can't look nice as well.

All things considered, this is a very promising debut for Tilted Mill, and Sega must be delighted with another excellent partnership on the PC following its recent collaboration with Sports Interactive. *Children Of The Nile* doesn't quite achieve classic status, but it has set down solid foundations for future growth. Hopefully, this isn't the last we'll see from the Sega/Tilted Mill factory.

VERDICT 7/10
ANCIENT EGYPT IS VIVIDLY BROUGHT TO LIFE

PHAROAH

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

CIVILIZATION III



games™ FUSED
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER
MINI-ME: It's possible to follow individual citizens around to see what they get up to.
GLOBAL VILLAGE: It's also possible to run the city from a much grander perspective.


eMag

TIMESPLITTERS:

■ Ah – you seem to have leapt through time to the point where a helicopter gunship wants to kill you. Most unfortunate.



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PS2, GameCube

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
Free Radical Design

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
March '05

PLAYERS
1-4 (2-16 online)

Multiplayer shooters today come in two flavours – plodding or crazy fast. So while Master Chief strolls around at a leisurely pace, the likes of *Quake III* and *Unreal Tournament* motor along at breakneck speeds. The two don't seem at all compatible either. Fans of slower games will hail things like *TimeSplitters* 'chaotic' as if to imply a lack of skill or strategy. But this isn't the case. Even in a twitch shooter such as this, co-operation and tactics are just as vital, if not more so given that one false move could see an entire team breathe their last in a matter of seconds. Yes, life is tough in Free Radical's latest, but life is good…

Future Perfect is split into three very different aspects. Arcade mode offers the most of the three, divided itself into a set of increasingly tough 'league' challenges and a wealth of customisable quick games. Even once you've aced the challenges, you'll keep coming back to this area – it's amazing how compelling the most simple concepts can be when this well put together. As for the other modes, Challenge exists to break up the shooting with some very odd tasks and does so very well. Shooting hoops, curling monkeys and racing cats are just a few of the activities to divert those suffering from a weary trigger finger. They're far from perfect, but as silly intermissions to the game proper they couldn't complement it better.

And then there's Story mode, an element that has come on so far since the first game that



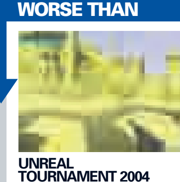
■ You won't find many games that can supply this much enjoyable blasting action.

TIMESPLITTERS



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

FAQs

Q. HOW LONG IS IT?
Story mode can be cleared in under ten hours but it'll take you months to unlock everything.

Q. HOW MANY CHARACTERS?
150 in total, from familiar faces to rookies, each with their own stats (which you can turn off if you're a balancing nut – not literally).

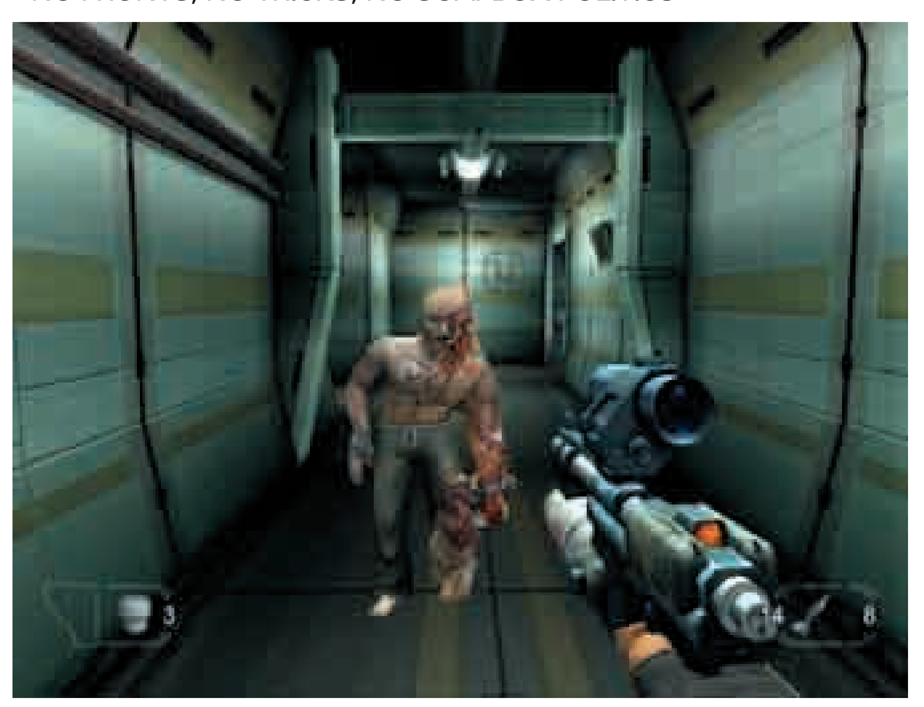
Q. NEW STUFF?
A little but it's mostly refinement and fine tuning, making sure the 14 modes are the best they can be both online and off.



■ A freaky monkey is still a monkey – and therefore we love these guys like brothers.

FUTURE PERFECT

"NO FRONTS, NO TRICKS, NO SOAPBOX POLITICS"



Challenge mode now openly ridicules its heritage for a few events. That said, it's still a rather straightforward affair. The 13 missions are as linear as they come but do manage to claw back a bit of respect for the sheer pace and scale of the action. Likewise, wit-infused cut-scenes bind the whole thing together with aplomb and this attitude adjustment is clear not only here but across the board. It'll probably be a love/hate thing with the gaming public – although the game might miss a trick or two, we can't help butwelcome it with open arms into what can be a poker-faced genre. Perhaps it's the addition of ninja monkeys and pirates that we love. No, wait, we're not that shallow. Really.

Still, as you might expect, any complaints about the single-player game suddenly crumble when the clinical and cool AI opponents you've grown used to are replaced with rowdy acquaintances, each more foolishly confident in their so-called '1337 skillz' than the last. As the clear focus of the game, it comes as no surprise that the multiplayer elements – both online and split-screen – should be so honed, but in this age of tacked-on extra modes that nobody really wants, true quality is annoyingly rare. A fine selection of well-designed maps (including a couple from the previous two games) make perfect settings for all the carnage to take place. And it is carnage, too. The game has embraced its BBFC rating, throwing in plenty of adult humour alongside the burnings, decapitation and plentiful splatters of blood.

With less chance to cause offence, bot AI – something notoriously tricky to get right – is surprisingly together and CPU allies and opponents generally kick ass, take names and meet objectives surprisingly well. Each has now been assigned a fixed rating out of five (as well as stats for speed, stamina and the like) to give you a real idea of what to expect. Poor little one-star Monkey is a real whipping boy but you'll quickly learn to fear names like Gretel and Goliath – five-star opponents that will give even veteran FPS players a real challenge.

Future Perfect is almost exactly the game we wanted it to be. Story mode and single-player antics are diverting enough but the game excels in multiplayer, offering fast-paced thrills that only the highlights of the *Unreal* series can really contest. It's a healthy combination of refined original ideas and the best of what other titles are doing, but we're hoping that the few instances of slowdown we noticed are quarantined to review copies of the game – the precision of the game can be ruined by even the slightest fluctuations, especially in network play. But even if it only existed as a multiplayer game, *Future Perfect* would still be worth buying. It's like they don't say – if it's too fast, you're too old. Or too blinkered.

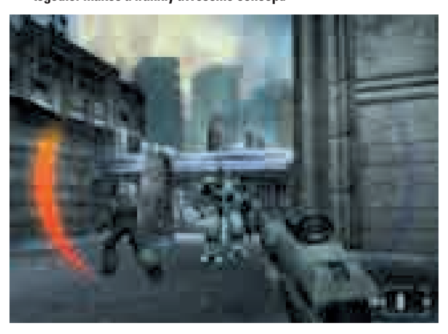


VERDICT 8/10

GET OUT THERE AND MAKE SOME FRIENDS



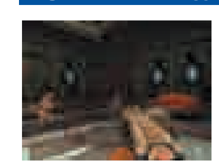
Ninja monkeys, ninja pirates… proof that putting two good concepts together makes a frankly awesome concept.



"REMEMBER A TRASH CAN…"

Time travel is a wonderful thing. The number of games (not to mention movies and books) that use the manipulation of time and space as an all-encompassing excuse for anything they might have overlooked is crazy, exceeded perhaps only by those games that fall to time travel when the writer can't think of anything better. Still, Free Radical's most recent offering is quite a different story. The main mode finds Cortez repeatedly hooking up with alternate versions of himself while trying not to create a much-feared time paradox. Handling of this jumps sporadically from convincing to a *Bill And Ted* level of 'just plain silly', something that works surprisingly well given the game's new-found attitude and direction.

PS2 £39.99 OUT NOW



Stunning visuals for the PS2 but not up to the Xbox's quality. It's as you'd expect in terms of content but the Xbox can store more created and downloaded maps than a memory card.

CUBE £39.99 OUT NOW



Naughty GameCube – straight to bed with no online play for you. The controller is an acquired taste but still works fairly well, and quality shooters are a rarity on the Cube.



The more the merrier **Hired Guns – Amiga [Psygnosis] 1993**

LOCKED

OPEN

DOOR

G U N S


eMag


A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.29 MARCH 2005
00p
RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
THE MONTHLY OLD-SCHOOL SOFTWARE REVIEW
DON'T GO JUMPING OFF THAT CLIFF JUST YET!
THE STORY BEHIND... LEMMINGS
A LOOK BACK AT THE BEST RUN 'N' GUN GAMES EVER
SUZUKI BAKUHATSU: THE GAME ENIX DIDN'T WANT YOU TO PLAY!
PLUS
RETRO NEWS, GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT, BUYERS' GUIDE, RETRO CONTACT, ULTIMATE COLLECTION AND MUCH MORE...
Wot, no fab cassette? Uh, that's because there isn't one. Sorry!
RODLAND
CLASH OF THE TITANS
UNSUNG HEROES
WE CHAT WITH KIM LEMON, CREATOR OF LEMON 64
GREAT GAME BOSSES
ROBOCOP'S ED-209

RETRO NEWS

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

I'm constantly being told that 2D gaming is dead, but I don't agree. Of course, there's no doubt that it's nowhere near as popular as it used to be, but I'm still pleased by the constant stream of titles that keep getting released. Once upon a time, lunchtimes at work were dominated by *Winning Eleven 8*; nowadays, we're all occupied with grudge matches on *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*.

A few years back, I had to make do with the likes of *Halo* and *Ratchet & Clank* for my gaming needs, now I'm able to play titles such as *Metal Slug 3* and *Viewtiful Joe* – and let's not forget the superb shoot-'em-ups that are getting released, like *Gradius V* and *ESPGaluda*. Yup, even if the view isn't always strictly 2D, old-school games are here to stay and it's something that pleases me immensely.

Many readers were concerned that the appearance of the PlayStation in the Retro section would mean that it would now start dominating the historically minded part of games™. Fortunately, that's not going to be the case. The third dimension appeared rather late in the life of videogames and it'll be a cold day in hell when we stop covering 2D titles altogether. Now, where's that copy of *3D Death Chase*…?



Darran Jones, Retro Editor

8-bit is best

CRONOSOFT AND PROTOVISION ANNOUNCE THEIR LATEST TITLES

Eager to prove that there's still plenty of life in the likes of the Spectrum and Commodore 64, Protovision and Cronosoft have revealed several new games.

Higgledy Piggledy is the latest title from Jonathan Cauldwell (of *Fun Park* fame) and is currently available for the ZX Spectrum. The idea behind this platform/puzzler is to steer your intergalactic piggies to the market so that they can be turned into bacon butties. *Higgledy Piggledy* features some solid animation, wonderfully cute sprites and two levels of multi-directional, pixel-by-pixel scrolling and is available from www.cronosoft.co.uk for a mere £2.99.

This isn't the only title Cronosoft has released, and if you're a fan of *Jet Set Willy* then you may want to take a gander at Matt Simmonds' *Astro Nell* for the Vic 20. After crash landing on a strange planet, Astronaut Nell has lost all his fuel cells and must negotiate over a dozen screens of platforming peril in order to retrieve them all. The visual style is very reminiscent of Matthew Smith's *Jet Set Willy* and *Manic Miner* games and the game is available for £1.99.

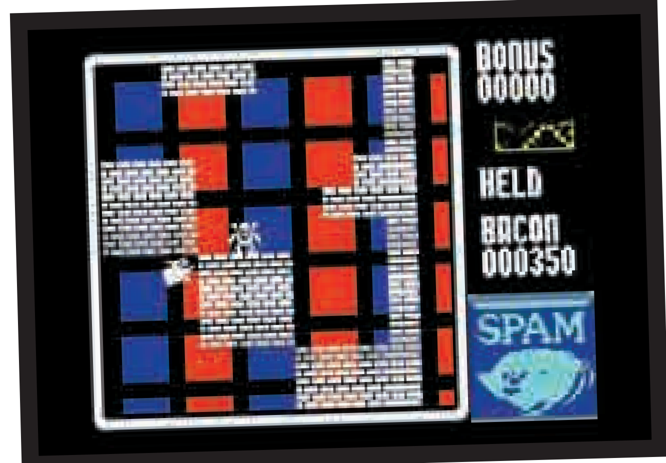
Cronosoft now has over 15 titles available across a range of classic formats and is constantly releasing new games. *More Tea Vicar?*, *Plan 9 Channel 7* and *Lunar Blitz* are just a few of the titles you can expect to be playing by the end of the year and many more are in the pipeline.

Eager to ensure that Cronosoft doesn't take all the 8-bit glory, popular Commodore 64 development team Protovision has also released its latest title, and jolly good it is too.

Tanks 3000 is a trigger-happy blaster for the C64 that's compatible with Protovision's four-player interface. As a result, up to four players can battle in 10 battlefields, and there are plenty of power-ups to collect while you're blasting away at your opponents. *Tanks 3000* is available on 5.23" and 3.5" floppy disks and should be available soon, so now's the time to climb into your loft and dust off those old computers.



▼ Enjoy some pork-product-based fun in Cronosoft's *Higgledy Piggledy*.





MORE CLASSICS FROM RADICA

CAPCOM AND SENSIBLE SOFTWARE CLASSICS REVIVED

Radica Games has revealed that it will be releasing two more retro packages later this year. Both plug-in-and-play TV games are based around the Mega Drive pack that was released last year and will feature Capcom and Sensible Software hits respectively.

The Capcom pack is a six-button affair that includes *Street Fighter II: Special Champion Edition* and *Ghouls And Ghosts*, while the Sensible Software set will feature *Sensible Soccer*, *Cannon Fodder* and *Mega-Lo-Mania*.

"*Street Fighter* is one of the most renowned fighting franchises in videogame history," said Shuichi Tanaka, licensing manager of Capcom USA. "With its anniversary, we are excited for an opportunity to provide new venues wherein fans old and new can enjoy the phenomenon of the original games that created a generation of videogame fighters."

Arcade Legends: Sensible Soccer Plus is due out in May, while *Arcade Legends: Street Fighter II Championship Edition* is out in March. Both will cost around £29.99.

GAMING NEWS

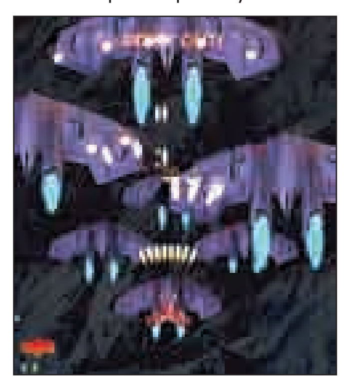
CARRY ON SHOOTING

DREAMCAST TO GET ANOTHER NEW SHOOTER

After the disappointment that was *Chaos Field* (let's hope the GameCube enhancements improve it) we're now pinning our hopes on the Dreamcast's next shooter, *Trizeal*.

Developed by Triangle Service and due out later in the year, *Trizeal* is further proof that there's still plenty of life in Sega's supposedly dead console. While the original arcade game didn't exactly get shmup fans excited (many have referred to it as a poor man's *Raiden*), we'd like to think that Triangle Service is going to add a few extra modes to make this a worthy purchase.

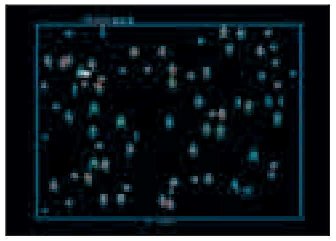
With both *Trizeal* and another arcade shooter due from MileStone (the developer behind *Chaos Field*) the shmup genre is still going strong, so have those power-ups ready.



RETRO GETS MOBILE

THQ TO RELEASE RETRO ARCADE HITS FOR MOBILES

If you love retro gaming but don't like the thought of lugging your consoles around, THQ Wireless may have the answer. In collaboration with Midway Games, THQ Wireless will be bringing several classic arcade games to mobile phones. *Joust* and *Root Beer Tapper* are available now, while *Defender* and *Robotron* will be available at the end of February. *SpyHunter* and *Marble Madness* are due in March.



Each game will feature central high-score boards so you can see how you're faring against other gamers, and you'll also be able to access wallpapers and ring tones for each game. Games will be available for a variety of phones, including Nokia Series 30 and 60, Samsung, Sharp, Ericsson, and Panasonic, and will cost around £5 to download.

While we're pleased to see such a range of classic titles, we can't help but wonder how the likes of *Defender* and *Robotron* will play on a keypad.

GOODBYE BRYAN

RETRO GAMERS MOURN PASSING OF RADIO LEGEND

Bryan Smith may not be a name that's familiar to everybody, but to the listeners of RetroGaming Radio he was a friendly and educated voice, whose love of retro was obvious to anyone who heard his shows.

Sadly, Bryan, who hosted and produced shows on the internet station, passed away on 25 January. RetroGaming Radio was founded by Shane R. Monroe in 1998, and impressed retro lovers with its passionate, honest approach and dedication to all things retro.

Shows are available as MP3 downloads, and you can read tributes to Bryan at www.retrogamingradio.com/goodbyebryan/index.php

Retro DIARY

As old-school gaming gets more popular, it's about time everyone knew about upcoming retro events...

MARCH '05

Sega Classics Collection

Date: TBA **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** TBC

Sega's latest compilation features remakes of many of its classic arcade games and is available for PlayStation2. *Golden Axe*, *OutRun*, *Space Harrier*, *Bonanza Bros* and *Columns* are just a few of the games on offer, so start saving.

Retro Atari Classics

Date: TBA **Publisher:** Atari **Price:** TBC

The DS's first retro compilation is looking mighty interesting. Play original classics like *Asteroids*, *Tempest* and *Pong*, or play newly enhanced versions that use the DS's innovative abilities. Definitely one to watch.

Psikyo Shooting Collection Volume 3: Sol Divide & Dragon Blaze

Date: 31 March **Publisher:** Taito **Price:** £30

Japanese gamers seem to be getting all the classics at the moment, and March sees two more shmups appearing on the PS2. *Sol Divide* was originally released on the Saturn and PlayStation, while *Dragon Blaze* has only previously been available as an arcade game. Expect a review in a later issue.

APRIL '05

Trizeal

Date: 7 April **Publisher:** TBC **Price:** TBC

Apart from the fact that it's been converted from a Taito arcade board, little is known about Triangle Service's *Trizeal*. Still, it's a new Dreamcast game, and what's more it's yet another shmup, so we're more than happy.

Dragon Force

Date: 28 April **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** £16

Dragon Force was a superb strategy title on the Saturn and featured tense battles, hundreds of sprites and increasingly strategic gameplay. As a result, we're very interested to see what the PlayStation2 version has to offer.

JULY '05

GCE UK

Date: 30-31 July **Location:** Fairfield Halls, Croydon **Price:** TBC

After the success of this year's event, we've been told that another GCE is now a certainty. Look out for guest appearances from Matthew Smith, Archer Maclean, Jeff Minter and hopefully many more.

AUGUST '05

Classic Gaming Expo (CGE)

Date: TBA **Location:** TBA **Price:** TBA

Last year's event was attended by none other than Konami and Midway and proved to be a huge success. As the expo prepares to enter its eighth year, you can guarantee that 2005's event will be even better.

SEPTEMBER '05

Jagfest '05

Date: TBC **Location:** TBC **Price:** TBC

Details are still sketchy at the moment, but we have been made aware that Jagfest UK will be returning this year. The event has been running for several years now and has slowly been gathering momentum. If you're a fan of Atari's ill-fated console, check it out.

If you know of, or are hosting, any retro events, please contact the Retro editor at darranj@paragon.co.uk

Retro

Rising Sun Retro

Think you know everything about gaming? Think again. We can point out a whole world of great import titles that you might have never played or even heard of, which is why we feel it's important to bring these classics to your attention…

S•U•Z•U•K•I B•A•K•U•H•A•T•S•U

Release: 2000
Format: PlayStation
Publisher: Enix
Developer: In-House

Why is it always the simplest and most enjoyable concepts that get ignored by the West? Games like *Super Monkey Ball*, *Kurushi*/*Intelligent Qube* and *Kula World*/*Roll Away* all prove that basic puzzle titles can be the most addictive, and yet there are plenty more we can think of that never made it over the Japanese border. Take *Suzuki Bakuhatsu*, for instance – a perfect example of Enix's ingenuity and imagination.

Literally translated as 'Suzuki Explosion', the concept behind *Suzuki Bakuhatsu* is far simpler than the story used to explain it. Through a number of cut-scenes, the game introduces us to Suzuki (played by actress Rin Ozawa), the daughter of a bomb-disposal expert and an all-round average lady. At least, she would be if it wasn't for the fact that every event in her life is doomed to end in an explosion of some kind – for reasons that are never fully explained, the poor girl keeps finding bombs disguised as everyday objects wherever she goes.

Naturally, it's here that the game begins: once each cut-scene has ended and Suzuki has encountered another bomb it's your job to move in and try to disarm it before the thing goes off. Straightforward? Well, it is… in theory. But if the game was that easy, it wouldn't be nearly as addictive as it is.

You see, while the earlier challenges – such as having to diffuse Suzuki's breakfast orange (yes, really) and her mobile phone – aren't too tricky once you get the hang of it, things move on at a breakneck pace as the levels progress. Your basic tools – consisting of a screwdriver, some wire clippers and a roll of tape – allow you to interact with the various obstacles that you'll come across (screws, solid wires and frayed ends that have to be connected back together), but knowing when to use each one is only half the battle.

The trick really lies in being able to dismantle each object in the first place in order to get to the bomb inside before the time limit expires; being everyday items such as a doorknob, a cassette tape, a gun and even the moon, finding the right entry points (and circumnavigating the dead ends and traps that hamper you later on) isn't exactly easy.

Sure, you can pan around each 3D object in fixed steps to get the best view of the task at hand but that doesn't always make things any more obvious. Will that screw set off a trap that shortens the timer from five minutes to ten seconds? Should I reconnect the red wire? Is that hammer going to hit the detonator if I make one wrong move?

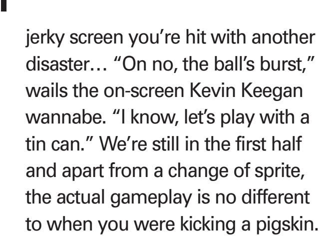
It's such tension and more besides that makes *Suzuki Bakuhatsu* so playable, and considering the lack of Japanese text we can't imagine why it never got a Western release. Well, besides the fact that it's so darn weird, of course.

HELPFUL HINTS

As we said, there's very little Japanese text in *Suzuki Bakuhatsu* with most of it appearing in the form of note panels stuck in convenient places around each object. Not being fluent in written Japanese most of it goes over our heads, although many of the panels are helpful pointers on where to go next. Some, however, are just plain insulting – considering we know the Japanese for 'idiot', we can at least tell if we're going down the wrong path on some levels…

▼ For dramatic effect, why not play *Suzuki Bakuhatsu* wearing a blast-proof suit?

▲ Red wire? Blue wire? Make the wrong choice and it's time to say goodbye to your eyebrows.



S•T•R•E•E•T G•A•N•G F•O•O•T•B•A•L•L

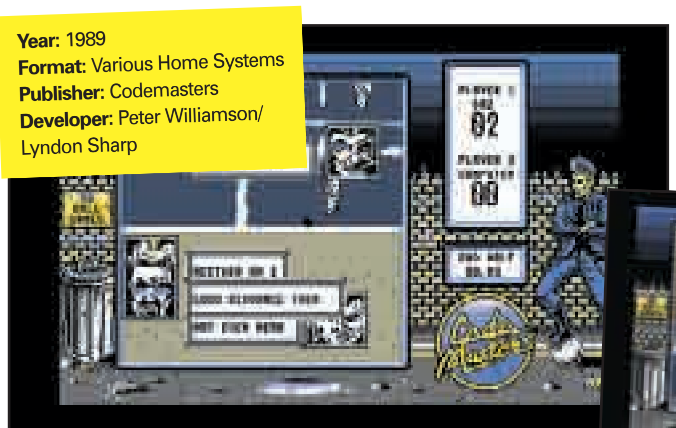
***Street Gang Football* is probably one of the worst examples of the beautiful sport ever committed to a home computer**. So why are we including it as a great gaming moment? Simple – it's filled with hilarious episodes that you'll remember for all the wrong reasons.

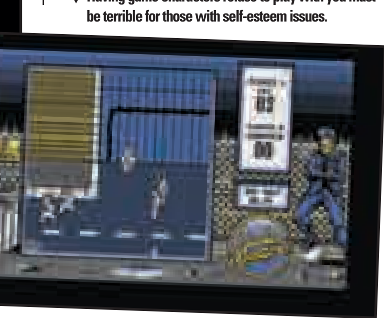
Picture the scene: it's 0-0, and after wrestling with *Street Gang*'s controls you finally smash the ball past the goalie's defences, only for the captain of the opposing side to say the ball was "out". Your on-screen character rebukes his hot-tempered opponent and the game quickly descends into pantomime. "It was in," argues the on-screen text box. "No it wasn't," the computer hits back and so it goes on until the screen is filled with boxes and you've lost the will to live.

When normality finally resumes and you're sprinting up the horribly jerky screen you're hit with another disaster… "On no, the ball's burst," wails the on-screen Kevin Keegan wannabe. "I know, let's play with a tin can." We're still in the first half and apart from a change of sprite, the actual gameplay is no different to when you were kicking a pigskin.

And then it happens. A second ball streaks past the computer's defences and now it's getting pissed off. "That ball was out," it complains. "I'm not playing," wails the big girl's blouse. "Neither am I," agrees one of its lackeys – and with that, the game ends. Meanwhile you're left flabbergasted and can only imagine what sort of developer makes a game so bad even its characters don't want to play in it…

Year: 1989
Format: Various Home Systems
Publisher: Codemasters
Developer: Peter Williamson/ Lyndon Sharp





▼ Having game characters refuse to play with you must be terrible for those with self-esteem issues.

GREAT GAME BOSSES

ED-209 IN ROBOCOP

Ah, Robocop – part man, part machine, great game. Ocean may have released some fantastic home versions of Paul Verhoeven's classic, but it was the Data East arcade game that got our blood racing – especially as you got to face off against Robo's nemesis, ED-209.

Of course, you had to reach it first, and when you're controlling a metal-clad cyborg who's as agile as an arthritic pensioner you'd be forgiven for taking a few attempts. Sure, he may have moved with all the finesse of a broken Tesco trolley, but at least the tin-can law enforcer was no slouch with his fists – handy, considering the amount of enemies that were thrown at you. Luckily, you quickly gained access to your gun, and after a few upgrades – and some rather frantic blasting – were finally ready to go cyborg-a-droido.

Storming onto the screen in all his metallic glory, ED began firing like a droid possessed and it was easy to get caught at the back of the screen and take a bodyful of hot lead. If you were able to avoid ED-209's fire (tricky when you leapt around as if the air was made of treacle) you could quickly counter-attack and position yourself for its next assault.

Time everything correctly and it was possible to take the mad droid down before it completed a second pass. Squealing like a deranged infant, ED-209 backed away and disappeared off screen, leaving the metallic cop to twirl his gun, look straight at you and "thank you for your co-operation." No, thank *you*.

▼ Twenty seconds to comply? The way Robocop clanks around it will take longer than that…



Release: 1988
Format: Arcade
Publisher: Nihon Bussan/ AV Japan
Developer: Data East





THE BASTARD SON OF…

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU BOUGHT THE SEQUEL TO A GREAT GAME ONLY TO FIND THAT IT'S RUBBISH? ALTHOUGH MANY FRANCHISES BECAME STALE WITH AGE, SOME SEQUELS TRULY SHOCKED US WITH THEIR MEDIOCRITY. THIS MONTH'S SHAMEFUL FOLLOW-UP IS SHINOBI SEQUEL SHADOW DANCER…

SHADOW DANCER

Format: Arcade
Release: 1989
Publisher: Sega
Developers: In-House

In 1987 Sega introduced the world to Joe Musashi, ninja master extraordinaire and lead character of *Shinobi*. Thanks to its blistering pace, smart visuals and varied gameplay styles, *Shinobi* became a huge hit, and the inevitable sequel appeared two years later.

Well, we say sequel, but 'unofficial follow-up' would probably be a more apt description, as Musashi himself was nowhere to be seen (he was instead starring in the Mega Drive spin-off, *The Revenge Of Shinobi*).

Set 20 years after the original game, *Shadow Dancer* placed you in the white garb of Joe's son Hayate, a ninja who'd inherited his father's skills but chose to travel the world with his pet dog, Yamoto. He may have looked as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, but Yamoto was more than able to take care of himself and would attack Hayate's enemies whenever he got the chance. Hackles raised, the white hound would launch himself at the nearest enemy and furiously attack him, thus giving Hayate the perfect opportunity to kill the distracted foe. Yamoto wasn't invincible, though, and if a stray blade or bullet hit him he'd change into a small, harmless puppy for a short while.

Shadow Dancer may have added a few new elements to *Shinobi*'s core gameplay, but the results were disappointing (particularly as *The Revenge Of Shinobi* was so much better). One of the biggest problems was the game's insane difficulty, a problem not helped by the fact that Hayate was nowhere near as athletic as his father. Jumping was noticeably slower than in *Shinobi* and the so-so level design often meant that you would get unfairly cornered by enemies with little chance of saving yourself.

Yamoto was also sorely underused as a play mechanic, and as you progressed you'd find his attacks getting repelled as the enemies became too powerful. Then there were the bosses… Many lacked the originality of those in *Shinobi* and were often a chore to defeat – strange when you consider how difficult and frustrating it was to reach them.

In fact, lack of originality was one of *Shadow Dancer*'s main problems. Despite appearing just two years after the first game, Sega's new title already felt tired and the fact that most of the levels were similar in design to *Shinobi* simply highlighted the problem.

Perhaps most surprising was the fact that *Shadow Dancer* looked and sounded much worse then its forerunner. Sure, *Shinobi* had a rather simplistic style, but it had bags of characters and was complemented by some superb tunes and spot effects. *Shadow Dancer*, on the other hand, looked rough and grainy, featured raucous rock riffs and just didn't feel right. Hell, even the ninja magic lacked any of the punch that the original game delivered so well.

Granted it's not the worst *Shinobi* title ever released (that honour's currently held by *Cyber Shinobi* on the Master System) but considering its roots, we were expecting so much more.

DÉJÀ VU

Once you'd dispatched an enemy boss and completed a stage, *Shadow Dancer* gave you the opportunity to earn an extra life. As in *Shinobi*, the idea was to take down approaching ninjas with Shurikens before they had a chance to attack you. The difference was that these ninjas were scaling a skyscraper and were jumping down towards you. But to be honest, the Mega Drive bonus game was a much more exciting prospect. Like the entire game, it was a complete re-working of the original arcade title and the bonus stage saw you leaping off a building and taking out ninjas as you passed them – much more fun.



SHADOW DANCER (Arcade) Sega, 1989 – Original arcade flyer



THE WIZARD

MARIO MEETS RAIN MAN IN NINTENDO'S BIGGEST VIDEOGAME ADVERT EVER

Many of you reading this probably remember *The Wizard* fondly; we do. It's still quite a fun little film, much like those feel-good mid-afternoon kid adventure movies you stumble across when sitting in front of the TV on a bank holiday.

The Wizard, released in 1989, focuses on Jimmy Woods (Luke Edwards), a silent, inoffensive child who's hospitalised with psychological problems following the death of his twin sister. When Jimmy is placed in residential care, his fiery tempered and invariably foam-mouthed brother Corey (Fred Savage) decides to break him out and smuggle him across America.

Corey soon learns Jimmy is a natural at videogames. We're supposed to believe this is because of autism, and when we watched *The Wizard* as kids we believed it. But as cynical adults we'd have to dispute this is actually possible within the context of the film. Autism is (almost certainly) genetic, but Jimmy's condition is a result of trauma. It's almost like the film is using autism as a cheap way to both evoke sympathy from the audience and explain Jimmy's gaming prowess as some kind of magical, extraordinary talent.

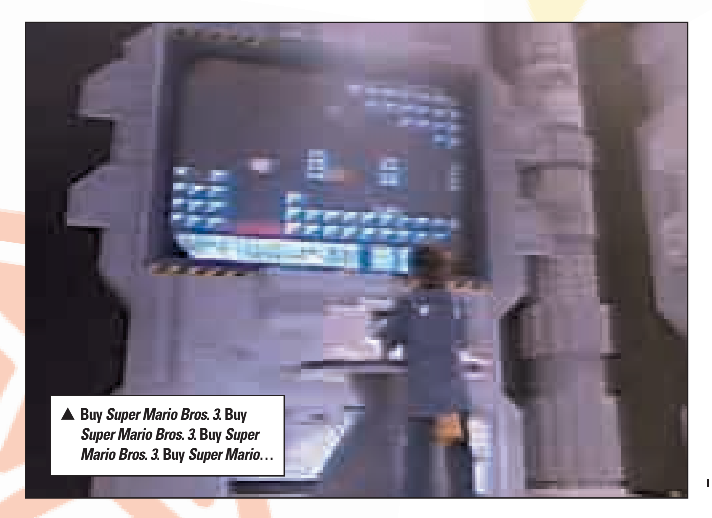
Seeing an opportunity for some on-the-road money making, Corey uses Jimmy's skills to hustle people and fund their little trip. Their first target is the wily and videogame savvy Haley (Jenny Lewis). She suggests they all travel to Los Angeles together and enter Jimmy into the Videogame Armageddon Championship – an easy way to prove there's hope for Jimmy beyond sitting in a hospital dribbling over himself. From here on in, the film turns into a giant advert for Nintendo, with NES games shoved into full view as often as possible. *Ninja Gaiden*, *Zelda*, *Super Mario Bros. 2*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*… the list is endless.

On their travels, the trio meet Lucas Barton, curly-haired pretty boy and Nintendo Power Glove enthusiast, laden with typical late Eighties/early Nineties skater garb. Lucas is also an expert gamer. "Pick a game, I have 97 of them… I know all 97 of them," Barton boasts, brandishing a carry case containing 20 cartridges at best – just one example of where the script fails to acknowledge the on-screen reality. We didn't even accept that bit when we saw it for the first time all those years ago.

And then the adventure reaches its peak. The three arrive at their destination and Jimmy blitzes his way through the opening round – but so does the typically Vision Streetwear-clad Barton.

Accompanied by a third contestant (who just so happens to be female, and a geek, naturally), Barton and Jimmy must play a new game, much to annoyance of Haley and Corey who spent the best part of their journey training Jimmy up on every available NES title. So what was this new game? It was none other than *Super Mario Bros. 3* – Nintendo's most important game release up until that point. And it was indeed new; when the film came out *Mario 3* had yet to be released – this was the ultimate preview. No surprise, then, that *Super Mario Bros. 3* would go on to be the NES's biggest ever selling game.

So the next time you complain about James Bond's mobile phone product placement, or some superhero's choice of soft drink, remember the film that launched several million NES games.



▲ Buy *Super Mario Bros. 3*. Buy *Super Mario Bros. 3*. Buy *Super Mario Bros. 3*. Buy *Super Mario*…



▼ "Behold my mighty Nintendo Power Glove! And my sleeves! And my Day-Glo shirt! Freak out!"



CABAL (Various Home Systems) Ocean, 1989 – UK Advertisement

TO LOVE A LEMMING

The much-loved Lemmings is one of the most famous puzzle games of all time and has spawned countless imitations as well as numerous sequels (some great, some not so great). Eager to find out more about this classic title we were able to track down some of the original DMA team and take a walk with them down memory lane.

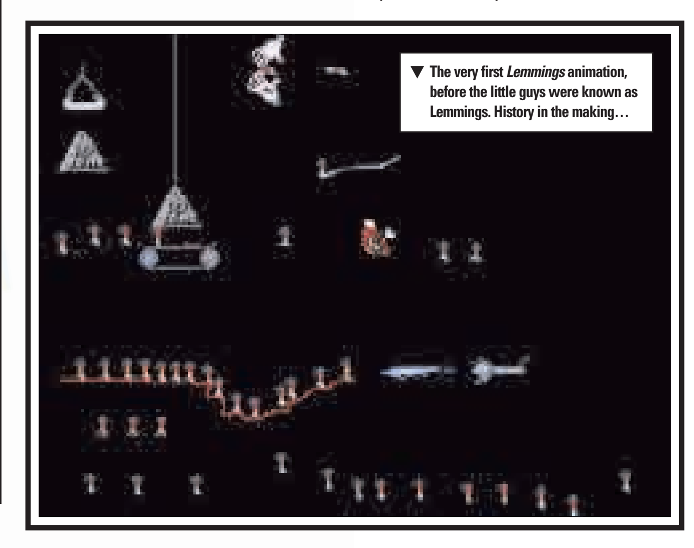
If you were an Amiga gamer on Valentine's Day in 1991 perhaps you'd sent a card to that girl you had always fancied but never had the nerve to ever ask out. If you were lucky, you may have even got to go out on a date that evening. However, if you were truly fortunate you'd have been sitting at home playing DMA Design's superb *Lemmings*. Dundee-based DMA's mammalian lateral puzzler appeared on the Amiga on 14 February 1991, and within months had also cropped up on the PC and Atari ST. Soon it would migrate to consoles, and then there were the sequels… it was the start of something big.

The Scottish developer had already dabbled with the shooter genre and released the likes of *Menace* and *Blood Money*, but *Lemmings* was to be a step (or rather, hundreds of little steps) in a new direction – the puzzle genre.

Lemmings' conception harks back to 1989 while progress was being made on DMA's excellent *Walker*. Scott Johnson was working on *Walker*'s graphics, and was challenged by Mike Dailly (*Lemmings*' programmer before Dave Jones took over) who felt that the 16x16-pixel characters Johnson was creating were too large and could be shrunk.

Before long Dailly had created a set of characters that conformed to an 8x8-pixel block and had them being squashed by a 10-ton weight in a simple animation. Gary Timmons (*Lemmings*' level designer) added several more implements of destruction: a cannibalistic clown, a pair of crushing hands and a rotating device of death and the hilarious animation was complete. "I modified the movement of the little figures to make them move more smoothly and added the further animations," says Timmons. "The potential was seen to develop this into a game, and so some tests were done where we saw how many of the little figures could be displayed on screen at once."

It was Russell Kay, author of the PC version, who first saw the animation's potential. Kay was also the first



▼ The very first *Lemmings* animation, before the little guys were known as Lemmings. History in the making…

person to refer to the characters as Lemmings, and by September 1989 Kay had a demo running at that year's PCW show. The demo itself consisted of a single screen and featured Lemmings walking across a landscape; once they reached the end of the screen, they simply re-appeared on the other side.

Although the team was convinced *Lemmings* could be a hit, getting publishers to share their vision was not so easy. "We knew we were onto something special and it was really a matter of persuading publishers," recalls Kay. "We were downhearted when everyone – [eventual publisher] Psygnosis included – turned us down. It was only when we had most of the levels finished that Psygnosis realised the potential of the game and eagerly embraced the project."

LET'S GO!

Lemmings may have started without a publisher, but the development time was relatively stress-free and caused DMA few problems. "The actual game took around a year to finish," confirms Dailly, "and to be honest, there was nothing at all that tricky from what I can recall. The main thing was the number of Lemmings, and I think that this was dictated by the PC version, although I believe the Amiga 'could' have had more."

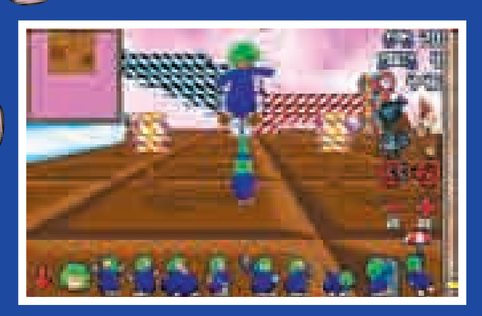
It's a view that's shared by Timmons. "The design, coding and animation of the Lemmings took several months, while the main level design took another few months, then a few months at the end to refine the levels and tweak the difficulty curve," he confirms. "There were no serious difficulties or problems during development, but the solid metal collision detection was a tricky part of the game to work out and is one aspect that I think could have been done much better [and it was in *Lemmings 2* and *3*]."

Unsurprisingly, the trickiest aspect of *Lemmings* was its level design, but maybe not in the way that you'd expect. "The main problem was that we had all these really hard levels but no easy ones," explains Dailly. "So Gary set about making simple ones, either by making easier versions of hard ones, or brand new and simpler levels. This, I believe, is where many games fail today – they don't spend the time making a learning curve. It's also one of the reasons why I think the game did so well."

Timmons agrees. "It wasn't hard to put down some blocks in the custom-made editor to make a level, but actually making a level with any sort of substance could be difficult," he explains. "Sometimes levels would turn out to be much easier than designed by taking another route and would then be reworked to prevent this from happening. Other levels could be done in many ways, but some had certain critical points that needed to be done just right to be successful. We tried to put in a variety of different styles of puzzle to avoid the game being repetitive, including levels that used graphics from other games, which I thought was a very clever idea."

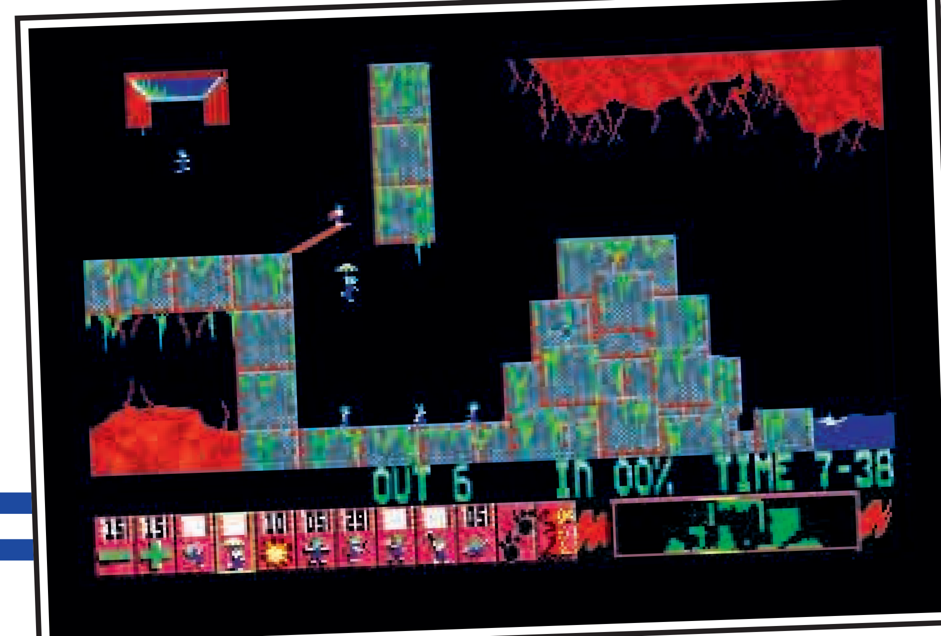
A game like *Lemmings* requires plenty of playtesting and for Dailly there was nothing more satisfying then seeing someone get flummoxed by a puzzle DMA had created. "We did manage to fox Psygnosis now and then," he smiles. "You could always tell the levels Gary did, as they were very 'minimal' – a few blocks and that was it. Levels by Scott and myself tended to look more like pictures. Scott's tended to be packed better than mine, but I liked drawing huge levels – 'Hunt the Nessy' and 'The Steel Mines of Kessel' were mine, for example. I also loved making the user do multiple things at once. 'The Fast Food Kitchen' was

OH NO! NOT 3D



As 3D continued to gain popularity, it was inevitable that the Lemmings would follow suit and, sure enough, *Lemmings 3D* was released for the PlayStation and PC in 1995. It never received the same acclaim as the original games, though, mainly because it was rubbish. "The 3D version of the game never hit the mark," says Russell Kay. "I think that *Pikmin* is closer to a 3D *Lemmings* than anything else that claims to be, although I'd love there to be sequels worthy of the name in the future." "*3D Lemmings* was simply horrible," agrees Mike Dailly. "It might work better now, but again, it needs more work than simply doing *Lemmings* in 3D. I wish someone at Sony would actually try." So do we, Mike, so do we…







◀ The backgrounds may have often been simple but you were playing for the puzzles, not the looks.

TO LOVE A LEMMING

mine, and required the player to jump back and forth to eventually complete the level."

BREAKING OUT

Perhaps one of the most exciting prospects of *Lemmings* was the level creator that DMA had planned. Sadly, it never saw the light of day. "There was some discussion at DMA Design to bring out a *Lemmings* level editor," reveals Timmons. "It could have been a lot of fun but there were a lot of conditions that had to be met when making a level and it would have been easy to make levels that were impossible to complete and this could have caused a lot of frustration, so in the end we never actually did it."

A CAST OF THOUSANDS

YOU'D BE SURPRISED HOW MANY PEOPLE IT TAKES TO MAKE A LEMMING…

Lemmings **had a number of developers, although as Dailly points out on his website, many took unfair credit – "the number of people that claim to have been involved in the original** ***Lemmings*** **is huge, the actual number isn't," he says. Nevertheless, the** ***Lemmings*** **team was still fairly large for the time. Dailly was the original programmer (although Dave Jones completed his work), Russell Kay was hard at work on the PC version, while Gary Timmons worked on the level design. The rest of the team consisted of Scott and Brian Johnson, Steve Hammond, Brian Watson, Tim Wright and Tony Williams. Although Scott and Brian Johnson (who** ***are*** **related – they're brothers) seem to have vanished without a trace, many of the team keep in touch and have moved on since leaving DMA. Gary Timmons is at Denki, Russell Kay is now managing director of Visual Science, while Dave Jones set up developer Real Time Worlds in 2002, where he's since been joined by Mike Dailly. Brian Watson has moved further afield to work for Midway in Texas.**



While *Lemmings'* level design is adored by many, it's the incredibly chirpy music that most people instantly recall. Remixed variations of well-known tunes, they're instantly recognisable and perfectly complement the on-screen insanity. Worried about securing the licences that would have been needed, Brian Johnson decided to remix timeless classics (*London Bridge* and *How Much Is That Doggy In The Window?* among others) that were out of copyright. "In those days you didn't really bother trying to secure licences," reveals Dailly. "However, it was just the start of worrying about it, so the copied music was eventually dropped and the irritating ones were quickly added. I don't even think anyone actually thought about just doing a set of totally original tunes, which is very odd."

One musical option that had to be dropped could have been terrific, but those licences got in the way again. "We originally wanted to have lots of Sixties TV show themes running through the game, not just in the music but in the actual animation and level design," says Kay. "Unfortunately, we could not get any of the licences involved. I have a particularly fond memory of the *Mission Impossible* Lemmings…"

The music may have been rather unconventional, but the look of *Lemmings* was a lot more straightforward, some might even say basic. As always, though, there was a reason behind each decision and in this case it was a technical one. "The way the levels worked with Lemmings walking over the foreground meant that they had to look 'basic' since they would have walked over the backgrounds too," reveals Timmons. In a way, the simple backgrounds accentuated the Lemmings themselves and left you in no doubt that they were the real driving force behind the game, a fact that was further cemented by their superb animation.

The famous green hair came about not just through choice, but also because of the PC's EGA palette, which only displayed 16 colours on screen at one time. "We decided that green hair was much nicer than blue," confirms Dailly,

With *Lemmings* nearing completion, DMA found itself having to drop a few features from the game



before it hit the shelves. The biggest omission on the PC version was the excellent two-player mode that would be enjoyed by so many Amiga owners. The team had spent a lot of time playing the likes of *Stunt Car Racer* and *Populous*, and Dailly even went so far as to rig up a system so he could use one computer to control the mouse on the other. Due to the Amiga's ability to have two mice plugged into it, Dave Jones (*Lemmings'* main programmer) eventually decided to stick with the split-screen set-up.

While Kay tried various ways to get the multiplayer game running on the PC, he eventually had to admit defeat, although, as he explains, coding the PC version wasn't as straightforward as the other systems. "It was purely down to driver issues," reveals Kay. "Nothing that we found could handle two mice on one machine, even though most machines had two serial ports. Also, the PC version was much bigger than all the other versions as it had to handle VGA, EGA, CGA and Tandy versions of the machine and it had to work on machines that were about the speed of the Amiga and ST. Needless to say, it took a long time to get it optimised to hit all the targets."

THE GREAT ESCAPE

The hard work paid off and *Lemmings* became an instant hit, and DMA soon found itself porting its hit to many other machines including the Lynx, Spectrum and CDi.

An arcade version by Data East was also in the works, but it never saw the light of day. While none of the original team worked on the title, many have their reasons as to why Data East didn't go ahead with the



▲ Sometimes you had to be cruel to be kind – the only way out of here was to blow up your Blockers. Poor little buggers.

◀ Remember kids – in the event of falling off an Ionic column, it's unlikely that an umbrella will save you. Safety first.

project. "I wasn't involved, but I heard that the focus testing did not go well and that it was too sedentary for a coin-op," reveals Kay. "I loved it, though, and the ROMS were rescued from destruction and are now immortalised in MAME." Kay isn't the only one who was sad to see that *Lemmings* never made it to arcades. "I really liked it and thought the trackball control worked fine as a control method," says Timmons. "I think it could have been really popular and I would have loved to see it in the local arcades."

DMA had little time to worry about the fate of the arcade game, as it was eager to start on its ambitious sequel. Unsurprisingly, a game with the scope of *Lemmings 2* faced a lot more problems, although it did allow DMA to bring the idea of tribes back after having to drop them from the original game. "*Lemmings 2* had some very cool technical advances over the original game," explains Dailly. "Dave wanted to expand this into consoles (which is where the money was heading), and to do this he developed some new technology that used consoles better, rather than just brute force the way the original version did. There were still some big problems to solve on a console, but now at least they were solvable. In the past, conversions of *Lemmings* to a console were very tricky, slow and usually crippled the game.

"Now, not only could a console match the home computer version, it could enhance it – the SNES version of *Lemmings 2* had parallax backgrounds and even snow. The Amiga version also benefited from the smooth scrolling that was developed for the SNES. Even the PC version had true, smooth scrolling, and that was a monster task that Russell only just managed to pull off. It was so effective that we started to see how poor PC monitors were at the time, since we started to see how badly the displays were warped."

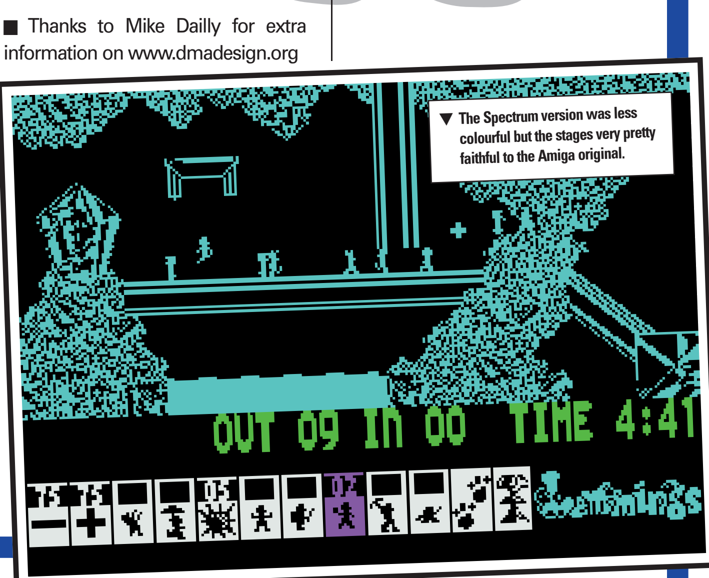
RUNNING WILD

Technical advancements weren't the only benefits of the sequels, as DMA could now bring a whole host of new Lemmings to the series and was also able to include a storyline. "We had brought out more levels using the same skills in *Oh No! More Lemmings* [a *Lemmings* expansion pack] and wanted to expand on the skills that could be given to the Lemmings, so we worked on that for the sequel," explains Timmons. "We came up with a whole bunch of new skills including the Pole Vaulter (which I thought was one of the more bizarre ideas, but it worked). The tribes theme also added a story and a reason for the Lemmings to get from A to B, and it allowed us to dress the Lemmings in new ways. In *Lemmings* if the player got stuck on a level that was it. In the sequel a player would have to get stuck on 12 levels before they were completely stuck. Other developments were the introduction of taller levels which could be scrolled up and down as well as from side to side and a fan to blow the flying Lemmings about."

All the gameplay enhancements didn't appear overnight, though, and DMA was having problems managing its team (it had grown considerably since the original game) and deciding on which directions the sequels would take. Although there was never a problem financially, Kay in particular didn't find the sequel as much fun and left DMA before work started on *Lemmings 3*. "There was a lot more pressure on us and we were less sure about the design, I don't think *Lemmings 2* flowed as naturally," he reveals. "Lets just say I didn't enjoy working on *Lemmings 2* as much as I did on *Lemmings 1*."

Kay may not have enjoyed working on the sequel, but it's clear to see that the original game was a labour of love for everyone who worked on it. And the reasons for its success are obvious. "It's all about the simplest of things," Dailly says. "Simplicity, killing huge numbers of the cute little guys, and the freedom of being able to complete levels in lots of different ways. In a strange way, this was the actual forerunner to *GTA*, as it's what got Dave hooked on 'open' games." Considering Dave Jones and the DMA team would go on to develop *Grand Theft Auto* and its sequels (DMA was bought by Rockstar in 1999, shortly after Jones' departure, becoming Rockstar North), this emphasis on freedom isn't so surprising. But then the success of the *GTA* series shouldn't be so odd considering this was the team that took a bunch of witless rodents to the top of the charts on every format.

■ Thanks to Mike Dailly for extra information on www.dmadesign.org



▼ The Spectrum version was less colourful but the stages very pretty faithful to the Amiga original.





LET'S GO!

Format: Amiga/
Various Home Systems
Release: 1990
Publisher: Psygnosis
Developer: DMA Design

It's a popular myth that lemmings are daft rodents that commit mass suicide whenever their numbers grow too large. Despite being untrue (Disney's filmmakers imported the poor creatures to Canada and then herded them off a cliff for the filming of *White Wilderness* in 1958), the urban legend did provide DMA with inspiration for its superb *Lemmings* game.

As in many of the greatest puzzle games, the aim of *Lemmings* was wonderfully simplistic, yet fiendishly addictive and the game was impossible to stop playing. A hatch opens up on each level and hapless Lemmings start to fall to the ground, their goal to reach the exit at the end of each level. Being rather foolish, the rodents simply walked in a straight line, only changing direction when they hit something, until they reached either their destination or a sticky end. Flames, pools of water, industrial grinders and deadly falls were just a few of the many hazards your hapless rodents had to negotiate, and a keen mind and quick reflexes were needed to find the appropriate route in order to get your group of furry dimwits to safety.

At the start of each level you were presented with a set of changeable skill levels that ranged from Fun to Mayhem (although more were included on the later console versions) along with a set number of Lemmings and the percentage that had to be kept alive. Along the bottom of the screen was a useful map (most levels in the game were several screens wide), a nuke button (for restarting levels) and a pause icon (represented by a pair of paws).

Also on screen were eight distinct icons that represented a unique Lemming skill. Diggers could plough through most surfaces at an astonishing rate, Blockers stopped Lemmings from walking into death traps, while Floaters could fall from any height without dying. Once the required skill was selected, it was then a simple matter of clicking on the appropriate Lemming to give it the relevant skill.

Upon receiving his new skill, your targeted Lemming was able to dig in several directions, scale vertical surfaces, build bridges (although if you weren't careful, he'd quickly run out of wood) or even blow himself up. Before long, with some careful planning on your part the little guys had negotiated the level's many hazards and had a clear line to escape and victory.

Of course, when you had a continual stream of Lemmings intent on walking to their doom things tended to get rather tricky, so deft manipulation of your mouse was needed if you didn't want your cuddly



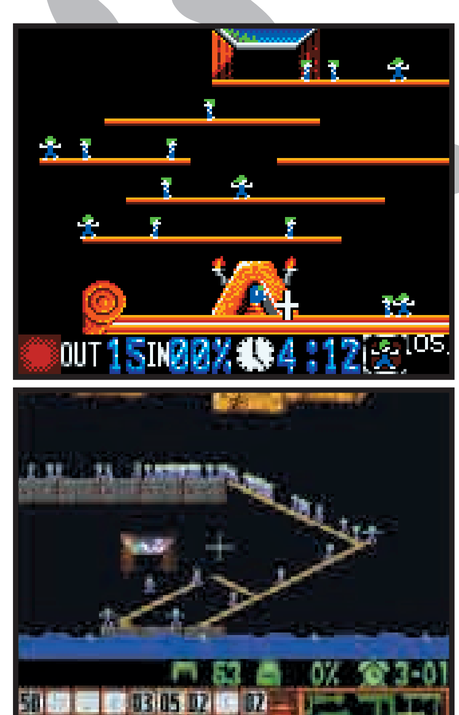


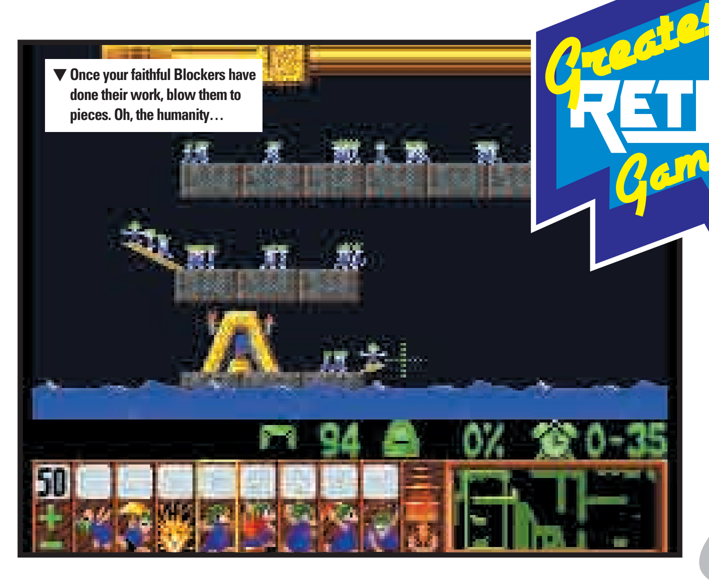
SO MANY VERSIONS…

Rodents are well known for their breeding skills and the Lemmings from DMA were no different. Versions of the game appeared on practically every console and computer, and although many of the machines lacked mouse support they all worked very well.

While the Mega Drive and NES versions were of a high standard, the SNES game is our console title of choice. The main difference was that you could cycle backwards and forwards through the Lemming icons with two buttons; other versions saw you having to hold down a button and scroll via the D-pad – much more fiddly.

Perhaps the most surprising thing about the many ports of *Lemmings* is just how good they all were. Granted, they didn't have to rely on fancy aesthetics, but the control interface must have been a real pain to convert.





▼ Once your faithful Blockers have done their work, blow them to pieces. Oh, the humanity…

Greatest RETRO Game Ever



▲ Skilful pummelling will see your Lemmings escape this ice-bound cavern. Then again, seeing as you're only allowed to imbue your Lemmings with bashing skills on this level, you don't have much choice…

critters to meet an untimely end. To make matters worse, you were often given a set amount of skills to bestow on your Lemmings, so any chance of continually using Blockers to contain your Lemmings while a select few cleared the level was hardly ever an option. While it was possible to slow the flow of Lemmings from the opening trap door to a steady trickle, you were only delaying the inevitable. Sooner or later you were going to be overrun with the buggers and when you were dealing with up to a hundred of the little critters your nerves soon got stretched to breaking point.

Even though the game could get incredibly frustrating (especially on the more difficult settings) trying to save your Lemmings was an incredibly rewarding experience and it became impossible to put down. Sure, it had far from revolutionary visuals (although all the Lemmings featured some fantastic animation and did look rather cute), and the levels looked liked they'd been knocked out in a bit of a rush, but the somewhat crude look of *Lemmings* simply added to its charm – which it had in spades.

In keeping with the game's upbeat pace, DMA had also come up with some fantastic tunes to spur the action along. Usually re-jigged versions of classic nursery rhymes or songs, they sounded absolutely superb and perfectly suited the on-screen chaos. DMA even saw fit to throw in a few voice samples like the opening 'Let's go!' to the doomed 'Oh no!' of an exploding Lemming.

It's easy to criticise *Lemmings* – get stuck on one level and you'd be unable to get any further, causing much hair-pulling and teeth-gnashing – but to do so seems churlish. *Lemmings* remains an incredibly satisfying game that perfectly mixes skill, frustration and humour to great effect. If you don't like what is arguably one of the greatest games of the early Nineties then give it one more go – you might be pleasantly surprised.

EVEN MORE LEMMINGS

Like many popular titles, *Lemmings* has received numerous updates over the years and several interesting spin-offs. *Oh No! More Lemmings* had a new skill rating, ten additional two-player levels and new visuals, while *Lemmings 2: The Tribes* gave you a staggering 52 Lemmings to choose from and 12 distinct tribes. *3D Lemmings* took the loveable rodents into the third dimension (and lacked much of the old charm as a result) while *Lemmings Paintball* saw your furry critters engaged in a massive paintball fight. In all, 12 official *Lemmings* games have been released, with many more unofficial efforts being created by the series' fans.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1990



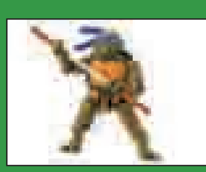
FASHION VICTIM

So what if it made you look like the Michelin Man? A puffer jacket kept you warm, and most importantly, made you look bigger then you were, putting an end to schoolboy beatings.



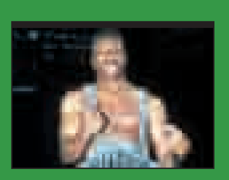
AT THE MOVIES

Yes, he's gone off the boil, and so Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas* remains his greatest film (and one of the best films of the Nineties for that matter). All together now: "Funny how?"



TOP TOY

Although they first appeared on TV in 1988, Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles became insanely popular in 1990 and became every child's most-wanted Christmas toy.



ON THE RADIO

Who could forget the baggy pants and outrageous dance antics of MC Hammer? We can't, no matter how much we try… And believe us – we do try.



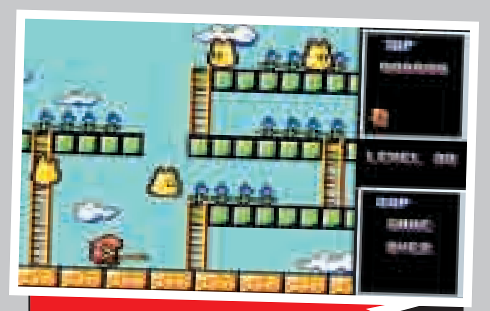
CARTOON HEROES

Originally starting off on the Tracey Ullman show, The Simpsons became so popular that they eventually received their own show that's still running today.



R·O·D·L·A·N·D

As gaming infiltrated the home market a new breed of gamer evolved. Dubbed the 'fanboy', he associated himself with a certain genre, machine or even developer or publisher, and then ridiculed all that opposed him. First recorded in playgrounds in the early Eighties, typical arguments revolved around who had the better machine, or which game looked best on which format. We aim to put a stop to years of squabbling by finding the definitive versions of some classic titles. This month it's the 8-bit computer versions of *RodLand*.



ROUND 1: VISUALS

COMMODORE 64: The big, chunky sprites of the C64 perfectly suit *RodLand* so you're left with a very solid looking game that closely mimics its arcade parent. The colour scheme is rather drab, but otherwise this is a good conversion and one that was rightfully popular with fans of the game.

SPECTRUM: We're in two minds about the Spectrum's interpretation of *RodLand*. While it features instantly recognisable sprites, it's let down by a dull monochrome display. Granted, this doesn't affect the gameplay, but it's a far cry from the vibrant colours of the original arcade game and does lose some points for this superb Spectrum conversion somewhat.

AMSTRAD: This is more like it. Not only does the Amstrad feature some very authentic sprites, but it's also managed to cram in all the vibrancy and charm of the arcade game. A great use of colour and some clever coding means that the Amstrad takes an early lead.

WINNER: AMSTRAD
RUNNER UP: C64

ROUND 2: AUDIO

COMMODORE 64: Sadly, *RodLand*'s audio is surprisingly poor considering the calibre of the machine it's running on. The title tune (which is the same on all three versions) lacks any sort of punch and sounds very tinny, while the in-game spot effects are just as basic. Very disappointing, as the C64 can do so much more.

SPECTRUM: We were pleasantly surprised when we loaded up the 128k version of *RodLand*. The title music is very jolly and totally fitting with the host hardware, while the in-game effects complement the on-screen action perfectly. There's also plenty of additional music playing while the game loads – a pleasant surprise.

AMSTRAD: It's not quite as poor as the C64 effort but we were still surprised that the Amstrad was unable to match the upbeat vibes of the Spectrum game. 'Grating' is perhaps too harsh a word, but you'll definitely not want to listen to *RodLand*'s main tune more then once.

WINNER: SPECTRUM
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

COMMODORE 64: While the C64 outing runs at a rather nippy pace it does suffer from the odd collision detection problem that isn't as evident as the Amstrad and Spectrum conversions. You're also unable to create ladders on the top platforms, which hurts your strategy on later, trickier stages.

SPECTRUM: *RodLand* on the Spectrum is nigh-on perfect. The collision detection is of a very high standard, things run at a nice pace and has extremely tight controls. Best of all, though, you can raise ladders above you on any platform, meaning that you can employ the same tactics you did in your local arcade.

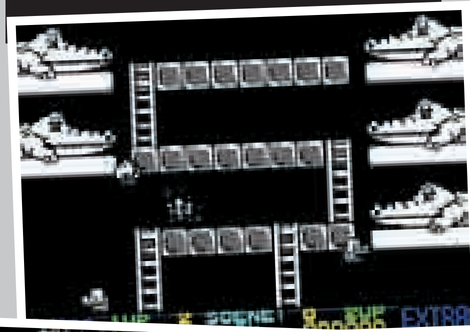
AMSTRAD: The Amstrad version is pretty much the same as the C64 conversion, but has slightly better collision detection. Sadly, the inability to create ladders on the highest platform will frustrate fans of the original, as you'll be unable to use the strategies that work so well on the Spectrum.

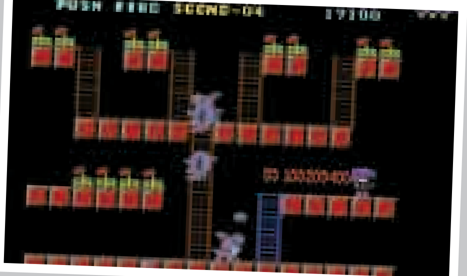
WINNER: SPECTRUM
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD (JUST)

AND THE WINNER IS...

SPECTRUM

Okay, so the monochrome visuals are rather disappointing, but there's no denying *RodLand*'s classic gameplay. Like *R-Type*, *RodLand* is a superb conversion that really shows off what the machine is capable of in the right hands.









E・X・T・R・Aを集めると1UP
2人同時プレイ可能・途中参加OK！
2ストーリー切換モード搭載！

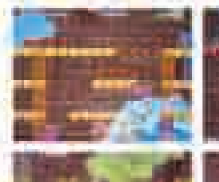


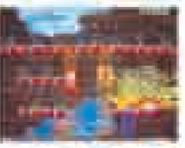
妖 精 物 語

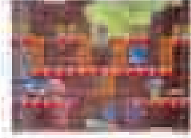


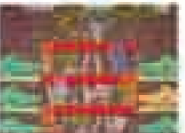
妖精達の住む不思議な世界へようこそ

妖精の村には謎の塔がそびえ立っていた。昔からその塔には、恐ろしい魔物が住み、妖精をさらってしまうという噂があり、「マブーツの塔」と呼ばれていた――魔物に母親をさらわれた、妖精の兄妹「タム」と「リット」が魔法の杖と虹の靴で魔物を倒しながら進んでいくコミカルファンタジーゲーム!!









ROD-LAND (Arcade) Jaleco, 1990 – Original arcade flyer



KEEP ON RUNNING (AND GUNNING)

GRAB A MACHINE GUN, TIE YOUR BANDANA AND PREPARE TO GO BALLISTIC

Ah, the run-and-gun genre. There's something about playing a soldier/alien /whatever and running around with enough weaponry to take out a small country that really appeals to our inner child. Maybe it's because we're a generation raised on the macho images of Stallone and Schwarzenegger (not to mention the Van Dammes and Seagals), or we might just be suckers for pretty pyrotechnics.

Whatever the reasoning behind it, there's little doubt that few games can get the blood pumping like a good old-fashioned run-and-gun romp. Titles like *Green Beret*, *Ikari Warriors*, *Berzerk* and even *Gauntlet* can all be linked to the genre, and while the perspectives or objectives may change, the core gameplay always remains the same – it's just you (though occasionally with a few friends) against seemingly unlimited numbers of bad guys.

If you're still not sure what makes a run-and-gun title, a quick glimpse at the game's cover is normally enough to set you on the right track. Pick up a title like *Arnie*, *Mercs*, *Gryzor* or *Midnight Resistance* and you'll be staring at several beefcakes with enough testosterone to be a danger to public health. The majority of them will also be sporting hideously bad perms. Topping off the ensemble will be a huge weapon (maybe the artist had an inferiority complex) that appears capable of destroying the planet, not just the jungle where the game's set.

These games may seem simple by today's standards, but the importance of the genre cannot be denied. Like shoot-'em-ups they were massively popular in the mid-Eighties and Nineties and are still being made today (albeit only sporadically).

Join us as we take a look back at the trendsetters of the genre, or those that were simply great fun to play. With so many classic games available we'd never be able to list every great title, but the following 15 examples are the perfect place to start.

Retro Feature

METAL SLUG

Year: 1996
Format: Arcade/Neo Geo AES
Developer: SNK
Why not try: *Contra, CT Special Forces, Alien Hominid*

For many, the *Metal Slug* series remains the pinnacle of run-and-gun gaming. Wonderfully detailed 2D visuals, stunning animation and frenetic, old-school shooting are just a few of the joys to be found in what many gamers consider to be one of the greatest arcade franchises ever.

Despite its World War II setting, the *Metal Slug* series has always been laced with plenty of humour; its cartoony style, over-the-top animation and inventive level design created a unique atmosphere that still hasn't been topped.

Starting off with a bog-standard gun (as well as a full complement of bombs) you could rescue POWs who gave you access to brand new weaponry. Heavy machine guns, flamethrowers and rocket launchers were just a few of the items on offer and it was possible to cause ridiculous amounts of devastation.

This formidable weaponry was needed, though, as *Metal Slug* was an incredibly tough game that required real mastery if you were to make any progress. As in all good titles, however, mistakes were always your own fault and could never be blamed on poor level design or unfairness on the game's part. It will always have a special place in our hearts.

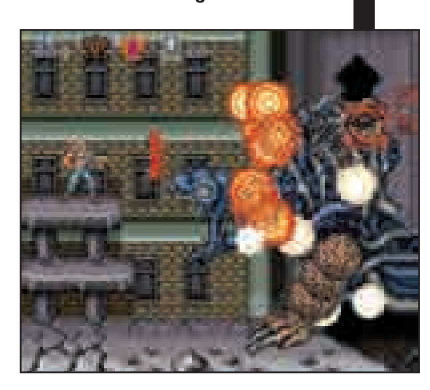
CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS

Year: 1992
Format: SNES
Developer: Konami
Why not try: *Contra, Super Contra, Contra Hard Corps, Contra Shattered Soldier*

Although *Contra* and *Super Contra* were both superb examples of the genre, it's *Contra III: The Alien Wars* that remains the crowning achievement of the series. A reasonably early release for Nintendo's 16-bit console, *Contra III* upped the ante tremendously by adding massive bosses, superb visuals and a rocking soundtrack to the core gameplay.

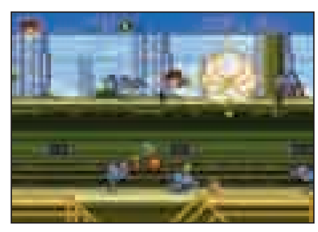
Huge, screen-filling smart bombs, inventive bosses (you'll never forget the plasma-spewing turtle or robotic skeleton) and challenging (but never unfair) gameplay combined to create one of the most visceral experiences around. While side-scrolling levels awash with beautiful parallax scrolling featured most heavily, special mention must also go to the fantastic overhead Mode 7 stages.

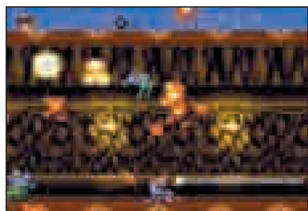
Although other *Contra* titles have since appeared on various formats (including the Mega Drive's excellent *Contra: Hard Corps*) few, if any, were able to capture the magic of the SNES outing. Granted, *Contra: Shattered Soldier* was a step in the right direction (although we would have preferred a true 2D game), but this seems to have been undone by the recent *Neo Contra*. If you're looking for the best in the series, then stick with the SNES or Mega Drive titles.



GUNSTAR HEROES

Year: 1993
Format: Mega Drive
Developer: Treasure
Why not try: *Gunners Heaven, Rooster*





Treasure's debut on the Mega Drive was absolutely spectacular and remains an incredible achievement for the 16-bit console. When *Gunstar Heroes* first appeared, Mega Drive owners' jaws dropped when they witnessed what their trusty machines were achieving. Huge amounts of sprites were thrown about the screen with gay abandon, there were rotation and scaling effects on display that would make a SNES blush, and the whole package was tied together by fantastic gameplay.

Variety always helps to keep a game interesting and it was something *Gunstar Heroes* had in abundance. One minute you'd be hurtling along in a souped-up mine cart, the next you'd be facing off against a massive grinning face.

Considering *Gunstar Heroes*' similarities to the *Contra* series (albeit with a much more cartoony look) it should come as no surprise to learn that many of Treasure's developers had worked on the classic Konami series. What was a surprise, though, was the amount of ingenuity and excitement that *Gunstar Heroes* contained. Even small touches like being given a choice of weapon, or choosing between shooting on the run or firing while standing still all added to its charms and it remains one of the best 16-bit examples of the genre.

MIDNIGHT RESISTANCE

The most noticeable aspect of Data East's *Midnight Resistance* was its incredibly slick control system. Rather than implementing a standard joystick and buttons configuration, Data East included a dial that allowed you to fire in eight directions. Not only did this give *Midnight Resistance* a unique feel, it also added an exciting new level of strategy that was often missing from other games in the genre.

Of course, the new gameplay mechanic was there for a reason and while the first stage was fairly easy to negotiate, the difficulty level quickly escalated due to the amount of enemies you had to deal with. Luckily, with a little effort the control system was easily mastered and soon became second nature.

Another interesting feature were the keys. Dropped by enemies in each stage, keys enabled you to access some serious weaponry at the end of each level. Three-way shot, flamethrowers and shotguns were all available if you had enough keys and added an interesting slant to how you tackled each stage.



Year: 1989
Format: Arcade
Developer: Data East
Why not try: *Turrican, Turrican 2*

TURRICAN 2

Year: 1990
Format: Amiga
Developer: Factor 5
Why not try: *Turrican, Turrican 3, Midnight Resistance*

Although the original *Turrican* blew us away (especially the astonishing Commodore 64 version) we have to admit to preferring the fantastic sequel. While the C64 outings were incredibly accomplished and made great use of the machine's capabilities, it was the superb looking Amiga version that truly hooked us. Here was a game that finally looked and played like it actually belonged in an arcade and not on your TV screen.

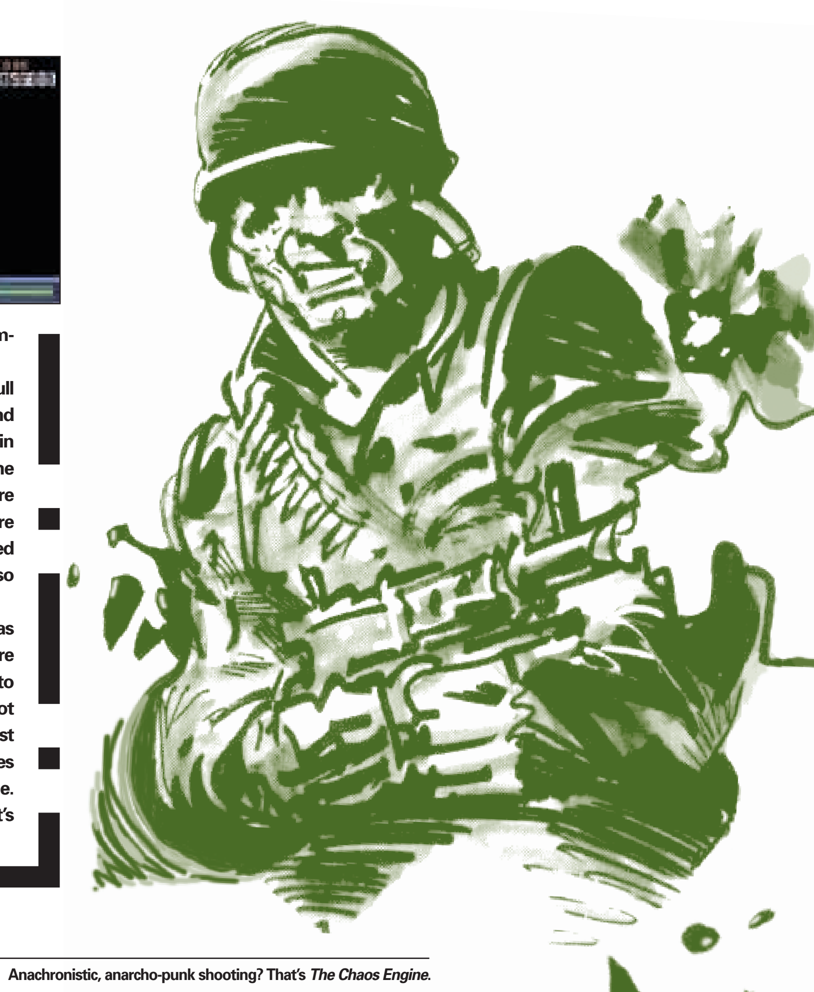
Keen to improve on the amazing original, *Turrican 2* featured even bigger levels (there were now 1,500 enemy-filled screens to battle through) and even managed to add



some excellent scrolling shoot-'em-up levels into the mix.

True to form, there was never a dull moment in the original *Turrican* and this was amplified a hundredfold in its ambitious sequel. Enemies came at you thick and fast, the bosses were masterworks of design, and the entire game had an incredibly slick, polished feel to it that was missing from so many other 16-bit titles.

While it might not have been as innovative as the original game, there had been so much care poured into *Turrican 2* that it was impossible not to love it. Many Amiga owners insist that this is one of the greatest games that was released on the machine. We're not too sure about that, but it's a very close call.



THE CHAOS ENGINE

▼ Anachronistic, anarcho-punk shooting? That's *The Chaos Engine*.





Year: 1993
Format: Amiga
Developer: The Bitmap Brothers
Why not try: *Chaos Engine 2, Alien Breed, Gauntlet*

Back in the 16-bit days of old, the Bitmap Brothers could seemingly do no wrong. Whether they were re-inventing the sports genre with the likes of *Speedball* or creating amazing shoot-'em-ups such as *Xenon 2*, almost all their games was acclaimed by critics and public alike. *The Chaos Engine* took familiar Bitmap themes (metallic visuals and a dark, futuristic look) and added a blend of strategic thinking and frenzied blasting that made the game stand out.

Set in a steam-punk Victorian England, this was strictly a two-player affair. Fortunately, if a friend wasn't available to help out the computer would control the second player. Each character had their own abilities and it was possible to level them up at the end of each stage. The levels themselves were vast mazes that required you to activate a certain number of nodes before you could open the exit. A certain amount of grey matter was required to solve each stage and this gave *The Chaos Engine* a unique style unmatched by most titles in the genre.

MERCS

Year: 1990
Format: Arcade
Developer: Capcom
Why not try: *Commando, Shock Troopers, Ikari Warriors*

We're a sucker for tough shooters and *Mercs* is one of the trickiest. Capcom took the groundwork that had been laid down in the likes of *Ikari Warriors* and its own *Commando* and created a frenetic blaster that ate 10 pences like they were going out of fashion.

Dropped off by helicopter, your task was to rescue the President of the United States and return him to the White House. The action kicked off immediately and before you reached the bullet-spewing jet at the end of the first stage you'd have dispatched around 40 soldiers, dodged what seemed like a hundred bullets and no doubt died a few times as well. Even though *Mercs* supplied you with a handy energy bar, the hectic on-screen action meant that only the most skilled of players would get through the first few stages with little or no damage.

As you progressed through the game your muscle-clad warrior was able to drive around in boats, Jeeps and tanks and could even use handily situated gun emplacements. Packed with a great selection of weapons (you've got to love the flamethrower), some challenging levels and solid gameplay, *Mercs* is the perfect game after a hard day in the office.



NARC

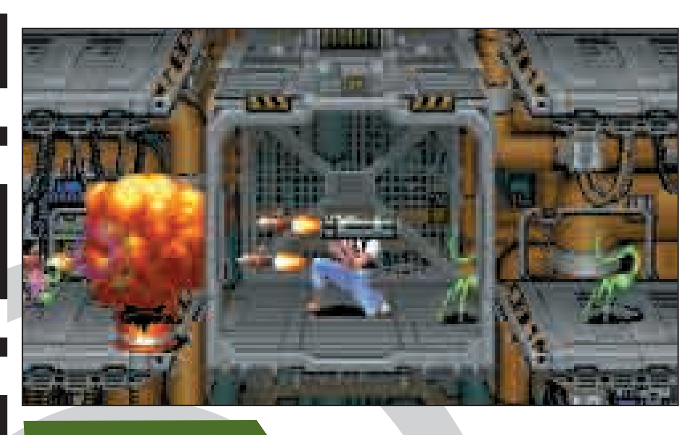
Year: 1988
Format: Arcade
Developer: Williams
Why not try: *Crime City, E-SWAT*

If you thought the life of an American cop was all about eating doughnuts and filling out mountains of paperwork, *NARC* could well have changed your mind.

Shockingly violent, *NARC* was a gore-fest that saw you playing a futuristic cop trying to make an important big bust. The streets were filled with all manner of scum and villainy, and while you'd score points for busting the no-good perps it was much more satisfying to simply blow them away in a shower of blood and guts. Famously sporting the 'Winners Don't Use Drugs' logo, *NARC* encouraged you to stay on the right side of the law by offering you huge amounts of points for any packets of white substances that you picked up.

Enemies came at you thick and fast and it was all you could do to keep them at bay with your machine gun and rocket launcher. In many ways *NARC* reminds us of the excellent *Robotron 2084* (both are by Eugene Jarvis) due to its tense gameplay and precise controls. Recently re-released on Midway's *Arcade Treasures 2*, *NARC* remains a fantastic and bloody blaster.





ALIENS

Year: 1990
Format: Arcade
Developer: Konami
Why not try: *Contra, Alien Hominid*

Forget the creepy atmosphere that had been so abundant in the 8-bit computer classics, as Konami's vision of the *Aliens* world was a non-stop blastathon that didn't let up for a second. Admittedly, it had stretched artistic licence somewhat with the various new aliens it had created (although the traditional HR Geiger creations were all present and correct in all their hideous glory) but you were having too much fun to care.

Taking control of either Ripley or Hicks your goal was simple: rescue Newt and destroy as many Xenomorphs as possible. True to form, Konami gave you a huge arsenal to play with and you were soon blasting away with rocket launchers, flamethrowers and three-way missiles.

The highlights of the game, however, were the fantastic into-the-screen sections that saw you tearing through the abandoned complex in an armoured truck. Aliens sped towards you at a ridiculous rate and it was all you could do to keep a clear head and pick 'em off before they reached you. The bold, bright colours may have been a stark contrast to the gloom-laden film, but as far as action went, *Aliens* matched its cinematic namesake perfectly.

SUNSET RIDERS

Year: 1991
Format: Arcade
Developer: Konami
Why not try: *Wild Hearts, Blood Bros*

It would be criminal not to feature this beauty. Bold, bright colours, fantastic level design and a great sense of humour are all hallmarks of this Konami classic. Set in the Wild West, *Sunset Riders* gave you a choice of four characters and saw you collecting bounties on wanted men.

What makes it worthy of inclusion here, though, is its cool setting, inventive boss characters and varied gameplay. One minute you'd be running along the backs of stampeding cattle, the next would see you tearing across the screen on horseback while dodging bullets. It was this continually changing gameplay that made *Sunset Riders* so much fun, a fact that was further enhanced when you considered all the comic touches Konami had included – get caught in an explosion and all that you could see through the inferno were your character's shocked eyes. *Sunset Riders* is a superb game that, like *Metal Slug*, mixes humour and action to great effect.





VARIATIONS ON A THEME

Although many think the run-and-gun genre just consists of side-scrolling shoot-'em-ups, it can be interpreted in many different ways. Some gamers will swear blind that *Metal Slug* and *Turrican* are simply platformers with shooting sections in them, while others will bandy about names like *Rastan* and *Bionic Commandos*. However, it just comes down to the individual's interpretation of each game (essentially, even something like *Doom* can be considered).

Granted, no-one's ever going to mistake the likes of *OutRun* or *Chase HQ* for anything other than driving games, but run-and-gun games are different due to the many different elements that they often contain. On these two pages, we'll be taking a look at some of the obvious (and more tenuous) choices that for whatever reason didn't make the previous cut.

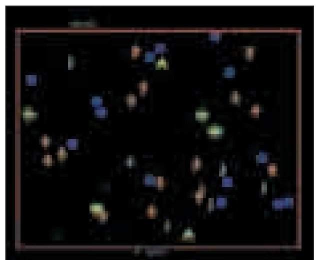
ROBOTRON 2084

Year: 1982
Format: Arcade
Developer: Williams
Why not try: *Smash TV, Total Carnage*

In many successful games the greatest amount of fun often comes from the simplest of premises. In *Robotron 2084* you're placed slap bang in the middle of a horde of vicious Robotrons with just two goals: survive until the next stage and rescue as many Earthlings as you can.

With all the action taking place on a single screen and with increasing amounts of enemies to destroy, *Robotron*'s control system was unique and a joy to use, as you had access to two joysticks – one controlled your movement while the other dictated what direction you would fire in. Not only did this create an utterly new experience, it also allowed skilful players to get as much out of the cramped playing conditions as possible.

While the first few stages were fairly easy – many of the opposing Robotrons simply attacked en-masse – the later levels were nail-bitingly tough and scared off all but the most dedicated players. *Smash TV* and *Total Carnage* are just a few of the games that are indebted to *Robotron 2084*, but in our minds, as good as they are, you're better off sticking with the original classic.



Robotrons – faaasands of 'em. Not so much running, but there's plenty of gunning.

CABAL

Year: 1988
Format: Arcade
Developer: TAD Corporation
Why not try: *Nam 1975, Blood Bros, Wild Hearts*

Okay, so all the action took place on a single, non-scrolling screen, but *Cabal* still featured all the classic ingredients that make run-and-gun titles so much fun. There was a decent range of weaponry to choose from, plenty of enemies to dispose of and massive end-of-level bosses. Everything was present and correct, but like the fantastic *Robotron 2084*, it had simply been confined to a smaller playing area.

Using a trackball (although there was another version that used a traditional joystick), *Cabal* required you to hide behind a wall and clear the screen of enemy opponents; once they were all defeated, you could move on to the next, harder stage. While you could run left and right to avoid enemy fire, you could only return fire when standing still. Even though you had a fair amount of cover to hide behind at the beginning of each stage, your enemy's continuing firepower would soon reduce your surroundings to rubble. Luckily, you were able to return the favour and practically everything on-screen could be reduced to ruins with just a few grenades.

Cabal's trackball made shooting really accurate (certainly more so than the sluggish cursor that accompanied the joystick version) and while the action got a tad repetitive, it remains a solid blaster.





▲ Do you like to blow stuff up? Then *Cabal* could be just what you're looking for.

SHINOBI

Year: 1987
Format: Arcade
Developer: Sega
Why not try: *Shadow Dancer, Rolling Thunder 2, Elevator Action Returns*

Shinobi is quite a difficult game to pigeonhole. While certain levels required a fair amount of platform finesse in order to continue, the vast majority simply saw you progressing from A to B and dispatching as many bad guys as possible.

Armed with an unlimited supply of shurikens (and no doubt magic pockets to keep them in), your task as Joe Musashi was to rescue a bunch of kidnapped kids and return them to the Iga clan. While it was possible to make it through stages without using any weapons (and you'd receive a hefty bonus for the effort) the real fun involved killing as many foes as possible. Burly, sword-throwing guards, knife-wielding frogmen and hard-to-avoid gunmen were just a few of the bad guys your mighty ninja faced, but all could be disposed of with a few well-placed throwing stars and some handy ninja magic.

Add a constant stream of enemies and the action rarely let up for a second – even the bonus rounds that saw you shooting ninjas for an extra life weren't a cakewalk. With memorable bosses like the fire-throwing Ken-Oh or the huge Samurai Red Lobster, *Shinobi*'s inclusion in this list becomes more acceptable.



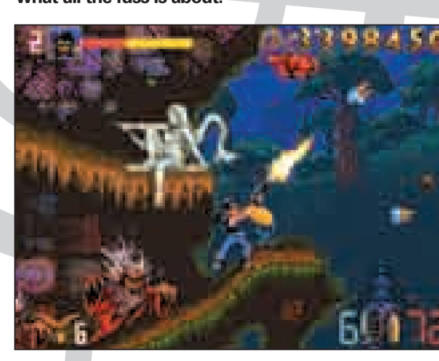
BIOMECHANICAL TOY

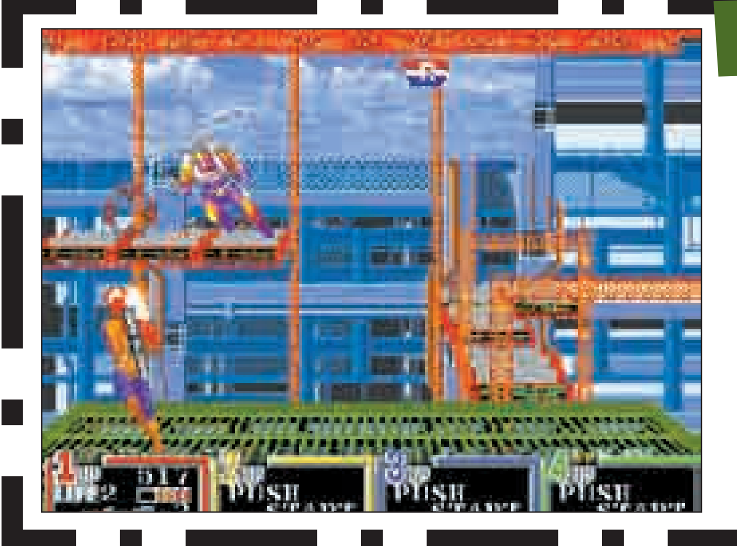
Year: 1995
Format: Arcade
Developer: Zeus
Why not try : *Gunstar Heroes, Rooster*

Like *Shinobi*, *Biomechanical Toy* is a title that straddles genres, but it's so much fun to play that we just had to include it. A platformer at heart – hell, you can even jump on the heads of enemies – *Biomechanical Toy* still has more then enough frantic blasting in it to justify its inclusion here.

While the weapon upgrades weren't as extravagant as in other games in the genre, the bosses were terrific and perfectly fitted the run-and-gun mould. Boxing glove-wearing chess pieces, demonic faces and even computer viruses were just a few of the inventive foes you faced throughout your journey and each one was as wild and wacky as the stages they populated.

Biomechanical's graphic design was a bizarre cross between *Alice In Wonderland* and *Micro Machines*, and once you'd experienced its surreal landscapes they remained with you forever. As you progressed through each stage, there were countless items to collect, which revealed the game's platforming roots. But Zeus combined the two genres so well and created such an enjoyable romp that to leave it out of our list would be inexcusable. Track it down to see what all the fuss is about.





GI JOE

Year: 1992
Format: Arcade
Developer: Konami
Why not try : *Mercs, Commando, Ikari Warriors*

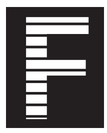
Who would have thought a coin-op based on a toy would have got a mention? Don't be put off by the cringe-worthy association, though, as *GI Joe* is an excellent little shooter and a worthy addition to the genre. And don't worry about the dire plot (something that seems to plague most arcade games) – just concentrate on all the hectic action and try not to lose your Joe in all the surrounding carnage.

The best way to describe *GI Joe* is as an into-the-screen *Cabal*. Each level scrolled towards you and you had to take out as many enemies as possible. Tanks, planes, oil drums and bullets were just a few of the objects you had to avoid and that was before you even considered the countless soldiers that swarmed through each level. Fortunately, up to four players could all work together and storm through the stages, so if you had a bunch of mates with you things got a lot easier.

In a world of polygon-based games, *GI Joe* now looks rather poor, but even the briefest of plays will reveal its gaming goodness.

UNSUNG

As retro gaming gets more popular by the day, it's high time that the unsung heroes who have worked so tirelessly to share their passion with others finally receive some credit. This month we have a chinwag with Kim Lemon, founder of the excellent Lemon64 website



Few home systems are as revered as the Commodore 64, so it's perhaps unsurprising to find a huge amount of websites devoted to the 8-bit wonder. What is surprising, though, is finding one that's as dedicated as Kim Lemon's superb Lemon64.

Launched in 1998 by the now 26-year-old Swede, Lemon64 has become a safe haven for both new and old fans alike (as well as several ex-C64 programmers) thanks to its relaxed atmosphere, helpful forum and obvious love for the machine that it's celebrating.

Indeed, such was the success of Lemon64, Lemon decided to set up a sister site for the C64's 16-bit brother and has recently launched Lemon Amiga, a resource that's proving to be just as popular as the site where it all began.

THE INTERVIEW

g™: How did you first get into gaming?

KL: It all started in the arcades with games like *Karate Champ*, *Commando* and *Kung-Fu Master*. My first home computer gaming memory was playing *Roland's Rat Race* on the C64 around 1985, and becoming immediately hooked. I quickly decided to get myself a computer, but knowing nothing about them, ended up buying a Spectravideo SVI 728. It was quite a disappointment, so within a few months I exchanged it for a Commodore 64 – something I've never regretted.

g™: So what's your Commodore 64 collection like?

KL: I'm not really a hardcore collector, but I do have a couple of hundred originals, as well as a wide range of hardware. My favourite Commodore machine is definitely the portable C64 named SX-64, though it's too clumsy and heavy to really be considered a portable.

g™: What's your favourite aspect of the machine?

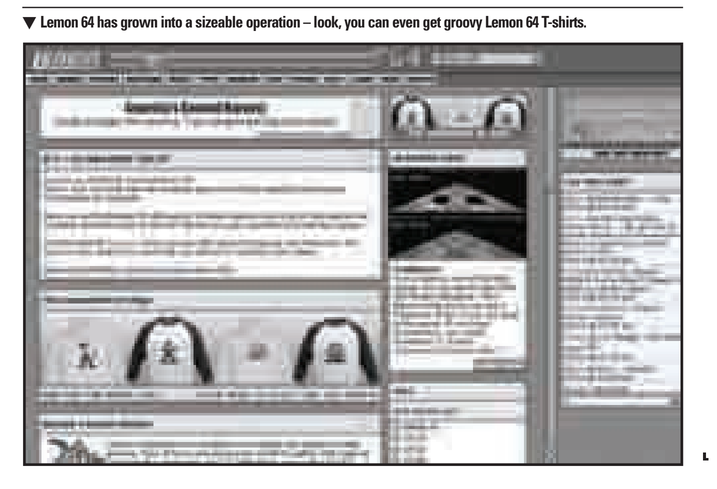
KL: The Commodore 64 is so cool and original in every aspect that it's nearly impossible for me to decide, but I'd vote for the SID chip, which in my opinion has the most unique and pleasant sound of all computers and consoles. Another thing I enjoy is to press play on tape and enjoy an awesome Ocean loading screen while a Martin Galway SID tune plays in the background.

g™: What's your favourite C64 game?

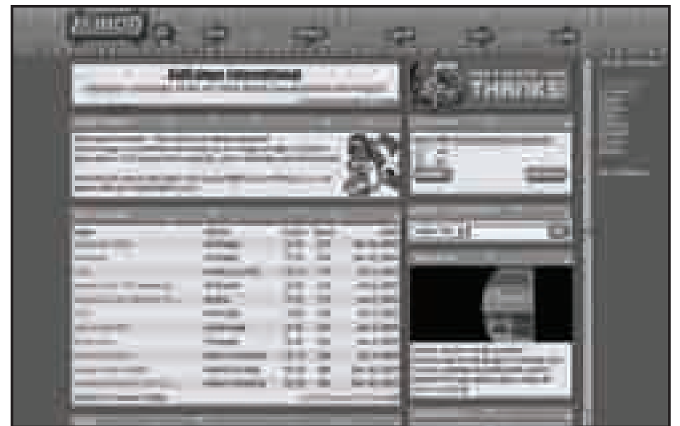
KL: *H.E.R.O.* from Activision is my all-time favourite. It's original, fast, simple and never gets tiring. I've finished it several times over, and even though it just repeats itself and has no end screen it's still magical. I've also got a soft spot for *Bubble Bobble* (especially in two-player mode). Actually, I could probably go on forever…

g™: What was the reason behind starting up Lemon64?

KL: Most C64 sites were rather poor in 1998, and either consisted of long lists of downloadable games or were really 'geeky'. I wanted a mainstream C64 site that would attract both the hardcore C64 fans as well as anyone wanting a simple nostalgia trip. The best way was to create a site myself; fortunately, a lot of other C64 fans enjoyed my efforts and everything snowballed from there.



▼ Lemon 64 has grown into a sizeable operation – look, you can even get groovy Lemon 64 T-shirts.



▼ Lemon Amiga is a new project, spawned after the success of Lemon 64.

HEROES

g™: What's the size of your team and do you have many contributors?
KL: Although our forum has a dedicated moderator team, I actually develop the site alone, something that's made easier by the endless help from friendly contributors and supporters. Most of the material, such as reviews, covers and advertisements, gets sent in to me by fans. Without all the support from its many visitors, Lemon64 probably wouldn't exist today.

g™: What would you recommend to anyone setting up a similar site?
KL: Be prepared for lots of hard work, as there's often a lot more to it then you first realise. Oh, and make sure you present the site in a 'human' way instead of making it too sterile and geeky.

g™: What's been the best thing about running Lemon 64?
KL: The knowledge of making a lot of people happy and helping them to relive positive memories, while allowing retro fans a good platform for their interest. Then, of course, there's the huge amount of friends I've made along the way.

g™: What was the decision behind Lemon Amiga?
KL: Topics kept popping up in the Lemon64 forum asking if there were any sites similar to Lemon64, but for the Amiga. Unfortunately, there weren't, so I decided to go for it, as the Amiga also has a special place in my heart. While the C64 was mostly about gaming, the Amiga was a much more creative machine. I whiled away many hours creating funny animations in *Deluxe Paint IV*, or jazzing up my workbench with beautiful icons and patches.

As of this moment I own an A500, A600 and A1200, with the most used being my A1200, which I've recently expanded by adding a 68060 processor and 16Mb of RAM. I also have an Amiga CD32 which, along with my Game Boy Advance SP, is my favourite console.

As far as I know, Lemon Amiga is the only Amiga site that combines a games database with fun and straightforward interactivity, therefore allowing visitors to comment, rate and review the games online.

g™: Do you plan on delving into other computers or consoles in the future?
KL: It depends on how much motivation and free time I have, but I really like the idea of expanding. We've been talking about this on the forum for some time, and a Lemon Genesis or Lemon GBA site would be very nice. For future projects though, I'll probably gather a team of database editors, with my role being to manage the project and take care of quality assurance. There's plenty of interest though, so you'll have to wait and see.

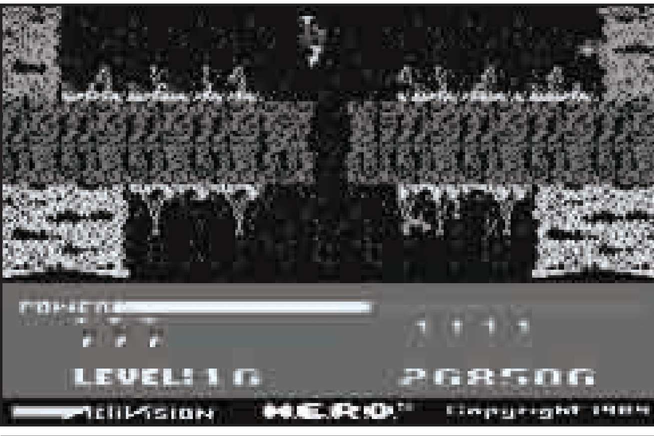
g™: What can our readers do to help?
KL: The best way to contribute is probably to surf in and enjoy the site. The Lemon community is very friendly and helpful, so anyone who needs help with games or hardware, or just want to chat about the good old days, should feel free to join in. When it comes to contributions, we're constantly looking for game cover scans and talented writers to expand our ever-growing C64 review database.

g™: How do you feel about the downloading of ROMs and is it something you've ever considered for Lemon 64?
KL: I'm rather torn on the subject of downloading retro titles so I'm afraid I can't give a clear answer. If you mean ROMs as in disk, tape and cartridge images, then I'm constantly hunting for permission from publishers to legally offer their games for download. However, if you mean offering illegal downloads of C64 games, then the answer is definitely no.

g™: Do you think retro gaming is a passing fad or will it continue to prosper?
KL: Just like everything else, retro gaming has its trends and ups and downs. I think it will continue, but the platforms will of course change. For example, when our generation is long gone, I'm pretty sure that C64 retro gaming will be dead with us…

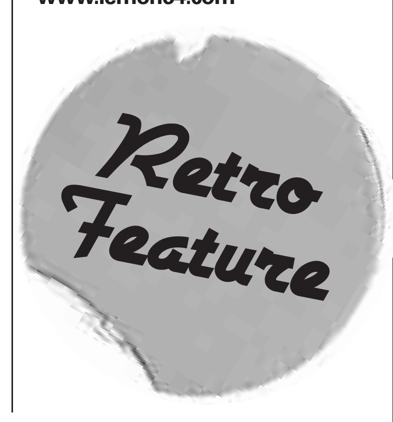


▲ Behold, the finest machine known to man or beast. According to Kim Lemon, anyway.



▲ *H.E.R.O.* is the game of choice for Kim. You may not realise from the picture, but it's "fast" and "original". Oh yes.

Lemon64 and Lemon Amiga can both be found at www.lemon64.com





Share your views about old-school gaming

Retro Contact

First Contact

If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to share with the world, why not write to us at: games™ Retro, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk

YARR, PIRATES

Dear games™

I'm a massive fan of 2D scrolling shmups and after reading your magazine I've picked up quite a few classics like *Thunder Force V*, *Gradius Gaiden* and *Einhander*. My problem has been that I've been struggling to actually play them. I was using Bleem (which worked fairly well) but I always wanted to play the games on an original PlayStation. I decided that the best course of action, barring importing a console, was to try and get a chipped machine.

Before I go any further, I'd like to point out that I don't own any pirate PlayStation games; I buy all my original relatively cheaply from eBay, or wait a few months and get them in the reduced sections of various retailers.

So imagine my annoyance when I went into my local Gamestation in Glasgow and asked, "do you have any chipped PlayStations?" only for the git behind the counter to retort with a smug "we don't sell chipped PlayStations, as they're illegal." Now, not being completely ignorant about these matters, I couldn't argue with the person, but I was pretty hacked off with the manner that he informed me – he tried his hardest to patronise me in front of the other customers.

I wonder, then, if the manager of the shop has also paid for the appropriate entertainment licence in order for the shop to play the Iron Maiden and various other heavy metal bands that regularly play over the shop's speaker system? Somehow, I doubt it's even crossed his mind – I'm a massive fan of Maiden so I really don't mind, but I did think that his holier than thou attitude was pretty hypocritical.

Anyway, to finish my rant off – I've managed to get a hold of a chipped PlayStation and the 2D import games available for it are just amazing. I'm sure that Sony won't mind too much – it seems to be doing rather well with its PS2…

Vince Betonesi

Sorry to hear you think the shop staff embarrassed you, but chipping your PlayStation *is* illegal so you can't expect to just walk into a high-street store and buy a modded machine. On the other hand, we're pleased to hear that you're now able to play all those classic PlayStation games you mentioned. Now get yourself a Japanese Saturn and true shoot-'em-up bliss will be yours.

QUICK DRAW

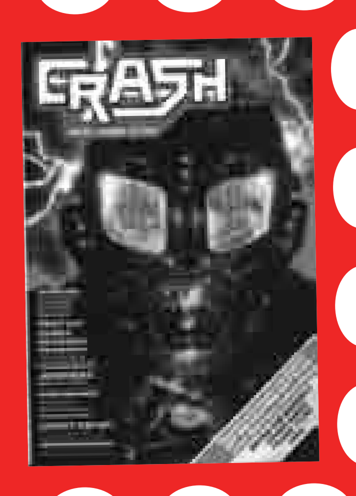
Dear games™

Many thanks for the superb feature on the wonderful Oliver Frey and his artwork (issue 28). It proved to be a highly entertaining read and a real stroll down memory lane for me, as *Crash* was my favourite magazine of the Eighties.

I'd always wondered what he'd been up to since and the icing on the cake was news that he's to release a book this year. Absolutely brilliant.

Pete Wilstone

Not a problem. Oliver's superb artwork has entranced many gamers over the years and it was great to be able to find out more about the great man's art and career.



LIVE IN THE NOW

Dear games™

Please consider doing face-offs in the 'Clash of the Titans' section for games that were on consoles like the SNES and Mega Drive. It's been Amstrad, Spectrum and Commodore month after month and I'm getting bored of it. Keep up the good retro work.

Michael Walmsley

The main reason we stick with the tried and tested 8-bit format is because these titles get the most requests to be covered in the feature. However, you're not the only person who wants to see other machines covered, so we'll be making some changes soon.

YEAH BUT NO

Dear games™

I recently dusted off my Dreamcast and started playing *Deep Fighter* (kind of like an underwater version of *Starlancer*). I got to the first cut-scene and could swear David Walliams, of *Little Britain* fame, was one of the pilots in the briefing room. Can you confirm or deny this?

Adam












STAR LETTER

Dear games™

I knew *it* was going to happen, but not so soon. I never thought I'd like RPGs; I thought they'd be too complicated. When I told a friend I was getting a PlayStation he said I should get *Final Fantasy VII*, as *Final Fantasy VIII* wasn't coming out for ages. I knew it was going to happen a year before, but not on disc one.

Okay, so *it* was seven or eight years ago for more clued-up gamers, but for me it was yesterday, and I just had to write in and say NO, NO, NO, NO, NO – Aeris CAN'T BE DEAD.

So what if in most of the cut-scenes she didn't have a nose, and her dress looked more like a pink shirt and grey puffer trousers? There really is a need for warnings on games. Forget *Manhunt*, with its frenzied plastic-bag stealth-killathon, maybe that's kids' stuff after all. "This game contains scenes of glimpsing the mortality of you and everyone you know, and not everyone who dies is old."

A recent online poll of *Final Fantasy VII* characters put Sephiroth above Aeris. The shame, oh the shame. An hour of FMV of Red XIII chewing Sephiroth in the painful way would not be enough. He will fall. But who goes in the team now? Cid? I couldn't carry on, so I played *Sonic Advance 3* for light relief. Knuckles died, but I didn't cry.

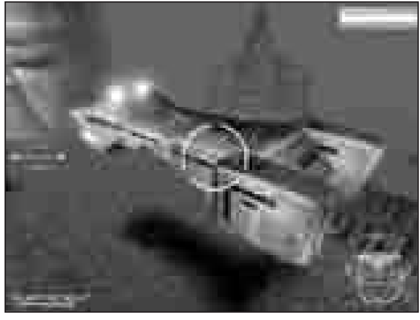
Flower Girl dies a year after you knew she was going to die, but not at the end of the game, and it's harsh. It's a cruel, cruel world. Games aren't just for kids, but sometimes I wish they were.

Graham Wood



So young, so vulnerable… so dead. Why, God, why? Etc.

You have to be strong, Graham, and finish the game, else Aeris' death will have been in vain. Here, dry your eyes on a lovely retro T-shirt.



Oh look, it's David Walliams. In a manner of speaking.

Don't worry, you're not going mad, that really is David Walliams' voice that you can hear on *Deep Fighter*. Rumours that the character will be making an appearance in *Little Britain 3* are greatly exaggerated, though.

FREE ALL REGIONS

Dear games™

You lot really have a lot of influence on the public. Having started to read your magazine, I'm now digging through all my old machines and replaying a lot of old memories. I've also started searching through my local second-hand store, where I found a lot of old games for the NES, SNES, Mega Drive and N64 for a mere £1.50 each.

Now that I've fully got into the retro mood I want to know if old machines are able to play American versions of games or if there has always been region protection. I really want to get a copy of *Final Fantasy IV* and *Final Fantasy VI* for the SNES, but I don't even remember if they were released over here. Would you mind shedding a bit of light on this?

Cal

While a few systems were region-free (most Mega Drive games were multi-region before the different coloured packaging came in), Nintendo's machines have always been region specific (with the exception of the various Game Boys). The two *Final Fantasy* games you mention never came out in the UK, but there are various adaptors that will work with them. Have a look on eBay and see what you can find.

PICK ME! PICK ME!

Dear games™

I was reading issue 27 when I saw your 'Ultimate Collection' feature in the Retro section. I had a look at the pics and read the article, and would like to ask to be considered for a future appearance in that spot. I have been a keen gamer over the last five or so years and have managed to pull together quite a collection. It all started when I got a job where I had enough money to spend on gaming. When I was younger I never really had a lot of gaming stuff, so I'm making up for that now. Please check out the photos on my website and let me know.

Chris

This is just one of dozens of emails we get every month from people who are willing to bare their gaming souls to the nation. If you'd like to be considered for an appearance on the Ultimate Collector page, send us a few pics of your collection and we'll see if you're worthy… As for you, Chris, nice pics – we'll be in touch.









Retro

C·L·A·S·S·I·C C·O·N·S·O·L·E £

BUYERS' GUIDE QUICK REFERENCE



BUYERS' GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£10-20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£15-40



ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£15
Atari Jaguar	£20-30

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35



MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£50-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£60-90
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£115-220
PC Engine GT	£80-180
Super Grafx	£200-300



NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-150 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-40
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20-30
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£10-25
Mega CD	£40-60
Sega 32X	£30
Sega Nomad	£75-150
Saturn	£20-35 (depending on model)
Dreamcast	£20-40

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo-Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo-Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo-Geo CD	£125-175
Neo-Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo-Geo Pocket Color	£30-50

So, you've just picked yourself up a second-hand console and are looking for some classics to play on it. The only problem is, you're not too sure what to go for. Hopefully, we can at least help to point you in the right direction.

Every month we'll be printing the current prices for a range of classic games for a particular system. Of course, this is subject to change, so don't be surprised if you manage to get one for less (or, unfortunately, more). This month we're going to be taking a look at some of the rarer PAL gems available on the Saturn.



Baku Baku Animal

Estimated Price: £15-25

Developer: Sega

Sadly ignored on its release, *Baku Baku Animal* is a superb puzzler that's quite hard to find (though the Japanese game crops up on eBay for as little as £5). Like the best puzzlers, a simple premise – match the right food to each animal – belies a highly addictive game.



Burning Rangers

Estimated Price: £20-40

Developer: Sonic Team

Not the greatest title from Sonic Team, *Burning Rangers* makes the cut due to its scarcity and low production run – like *Panzer Dragoon Saga* it was one of the last games to get a UK release. Luckily, it's fairly easy to source, but its price is heading ever upwards.

Shining Force III

Estimated Price: £20-60

Developer: Camelot

The cruellest aspect of playing *Shining Force III* is the fact that only those fluent in Japanese will be able to enjoy the game as it was intended. Split into three scenarios in Japan, only the first made it to UK shores – a shame as it's a cracking series and well worth owning.



Deep Fear

Estimated Price: £40-70

Developer: Sega

If you're a fan of survival horror and don't mind splashing out, *Deep Fear* is a decent alternative to *Resident Evil*. Set on a deep-sea research rig and featuring some novel touches (you always need to be aware of your air pressure, for example) this is an interesting spin on the genre.

Guardian Heroes

Estimate Price: £20-50

Developer: Treasure

Hardly an issue goes by when we don't mention Treasure's superb beat-'em-up. It's one of the greatest scrolling fighters ever made and is an essential purchase for fans of both the genre and the Saturn. It's not too hard to track down, but be prepared to pay a high price for it.



Dragon Force

Estimated Price: £35-60

Developer: Sega

Dragon Force was another title that was released close to the Saturn's UK demise, and it's now extremely hard to get hold of. This is a shame as it's an excellent strategy title that's enhanced by stunning battle scenes, which contain hundreds of beautifully drawn sprites.



BomberMan

Estimated Price: £15-30

Developer: Hudsonsoft

Bomber-Man is what your Saturn's Multi-tap was made for. Forget about the so-so single-player modes, it's always been the Vs game that made the *Bomber-Man* series so good. Being able to play against nine other players is superb fun and adds a brand new level of strategy.





Panzer Dragoon Saga

Estimated Price: £70-120

Developer: Team Andromeda

Moving away from the on-rail shooting that made the first two games so popular, *Panzer Dragoon Saga* was epic. Gorgeous visuals, a sweeping score and a gripping story all combined to create one of the best Saturn games ever released.



THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION

UNLIKE MANY OF OUR PREVIOUS COLLECTORS, DISCERNING MARK KIDLEY, A 19-YEAR-OLD GRAPHIC DESIGN STUDENT FROM WARRINGTON, LIKES TO KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR MORE SPECIFIC ITEMS…

Q) How long have you been collecting?
I've been collecting Sega items for about 18 months, and it all started when I decided to re-purchase a Dreamcast. Before long I'd picked up a Mega Drive (my favourite console when I was a kid) and my Sega obsession grew from there. Since then I've been buying up loads of stuff that I always wanted to play but had never got around to.

Q) How much is your collection worth?
I'd say probably around £3,000, but I stopped counting months ago. I've got over 250 games, a few Japanese boxed consoles, a Genesis 3 and a load of PAL Sega consoles, some being near mint condition and boxed.

Q) What's your most prized possession?
Well, I have a few items that are pretty important to me. I acquired my *Samba De Amigo* for £100, which was a bargain as it was in perfect condition. I'm also fond of my Sega Saturn 100 Campaign Box, and I'm never without my boxed Nomad (perfect for a quick blast on *Sonic 2*). If I'm honest, it probably has to be *Samba De Amigo* – easily one of the best games ever made by Sonic Team.

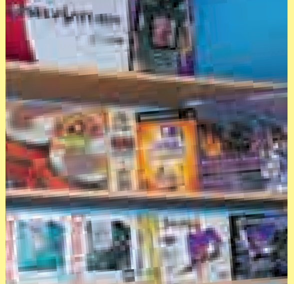
Q) What's the most highly desirable item that you haven't managed to find yet?
I'm able to track down a lot of things pretty well on eBay and various import sites – it's normally the prices that prove to be a problem. My current wanted list includes the likes of *Radiant Silvergun*, *Panzer Dragoon Saga*, most of the Japanese limited edition Dreamcasts, the Wondermega and the Limited Edition Saturns.

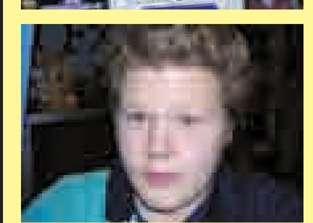
Q) What sources do you use and have you ever found a real bargain?
I usually tend to stick with eBay and have managed to get quite a few bargains, especially from Japanese sellers. I've just tracked down an ASCII Mission Stick for the Dreamcast, which at $10 was an absolute steal. I've also picked up several bargains in my local Gamestation.

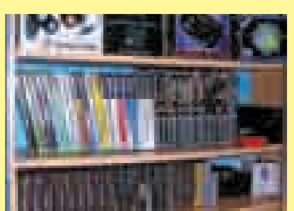
Q) What's the most money you've ever spent on a single item?
I've not really spent over £130 on a single item yet. My most expensive game would have to be my mint condition *Samba De Amigo* for £100, while the most expensive piece of hardware was my £130 Sega Nomad. However, this is bound to change once I start going after the limited edition Dreamcasts.

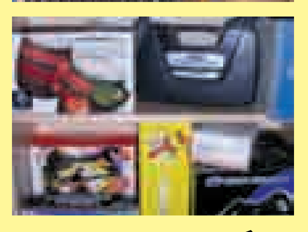
Q) What does your family think of your collecting habit?
My parents seem to think that I'm still 10 years old (mentally). They're always going on about me spending my money on old games when I should be getting driving lessons. My mum also complains about the dust my games collect and keeps asking if she can bin my game boxes or the promotional stands that I've got. So yeah, I don't think they like me having a games collection much.



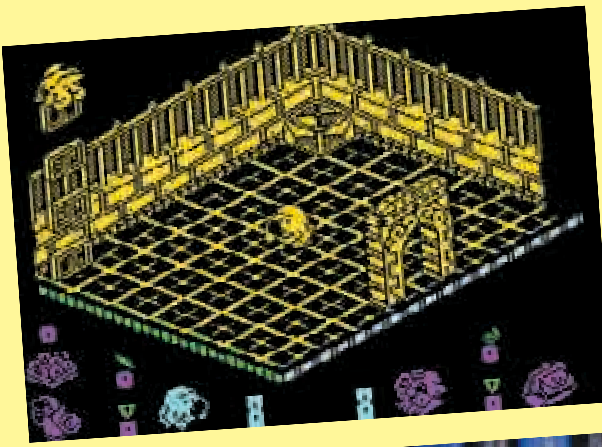








NEXT MONTH IN RETRO



Join us as we look back at Ocean, one of the most prolific software houses of the Eighties and Nineties. And we'll be examining the classic Sega titles that have been remade for the PlayStation2… *See you then!*

ON SALE 24 MAR


eMag

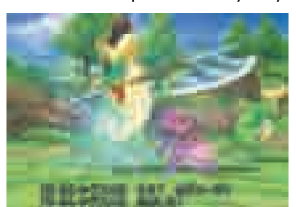
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



DRAGON QUEST VIII

The opinion that *Dragon Quest VIII* is actually better than *Final Fantasy VII* has raised a few eyebrows since last month, but it's certainly a close call. Without a doubt, Square-Enix's revitalisation of the *DQ* series is a masterpiece in every way.



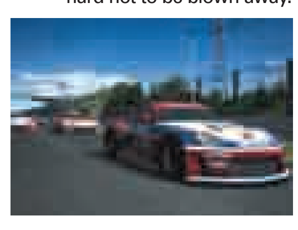
SHADOW OF ROME

Capcom was always walking a tightrope by developing a game that is most certainly not a Capcom game, but we're grateful that the blood-soaked combat stages feature enough fun to make up for this (and the less said about the stealth, the better, eh?).



GRAN TURISMO 4

Well done, Sony – you've managed to create a racer that has all the cars. *All* the cars. Sure, it's a shame that the AI is still a bit lacking, but when you consider just how much there is to do and how lovely it all looks it's hard not to be blown away.





PLAYSTATION2

Manufacturer Sony
UK Launch Date
24 November 2000
Media
4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £104.99

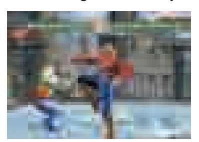
The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue now that the remodelled, one-quarter-size PStwo is available.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

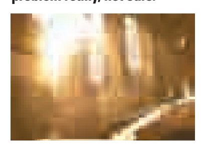
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	EA takes the arcade racing genre to new heights
Dark Chronicle	Sony	In-House	In-depth RPGs don't come much bigger than this
Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House	The original is still the best by a long shot
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	Like your RPGs practically endless? Then this is for you
Gran Turismo 4 IMPORT	Sony	Polyphony Digital	Worth the wait, thankfully – even without the online mode
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Bigger, badder, better – a great *GTA* experience
Gregory Horror Show	Capcom	In-House	Bizarre, twisted and yet oh-so enjoyable
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
Katamari Damacy IMPORT	Namco	In-House	One of the quirkiest action puzzle games around
NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports Big	The daddy of basketball games – no contest
Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within	Ubisoft	In-House	The Prince returns, darker than ever before
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House	The only football game worth owning, period.
Rez	Sega	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
Silent Hill 2	Konami	In-House	The high point of Konami's survival horror series
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk's* of the snowboarding world
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft	Better? Again? How does Neversoft keep doing it?
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House	By far the deepest 3D fighting game around today

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

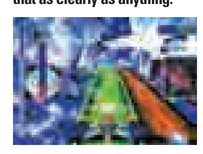
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution
According to our resident videogame ninja, *VF4: Evo* is the best game EVER. And how can we disagree with a ninja?



Ico
Buy it. Buy it now. You have to. We don't care if you can't find it in the shops – that's your problem really, not ours.



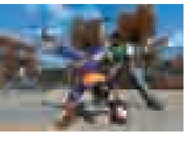
Amplitude
Rhythm action isn't just for people who like *DDR*, you know – Harmonix's title proves that as clearly as anything.



Katamari Damacy
Rejoice, friends – the sequel's coming out in Europe, so if you haven't got an import PS2 you won't miss out.



NBA Street 2
Going on preview code of EA's recent *Street* games, you should get this – it's likely to be the last good one, sadly.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…



XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft
UK Launch Date
13 March 2002
Media
4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £99.99

Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded, although the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs. The 'special edition' Crystal console is now widely available from stores across the country.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

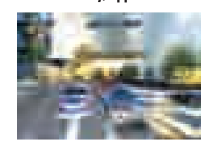
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	The game that redefines the arcade racing genre
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios	A fine example of great gameplay and top-notch graphics
Def Jam: Fight For New York	Electronic Arts	Aki Corporation	Ultra-violent fighting has never looked so good
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	Ion Storm	Freestyle adventuring with a decent first-person twist
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box	A special breed of RPG – well worth experiencing
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	The best versions of *GTA III* and *Vice City*, without a doubt
Halo 2	Microsoft	Bungie	The Xbox's most popular game just got even better
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Tecmo	Damn tough, but a great example of style and gameplay
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants	A complete change of pace for Oddworld that really works
OutRun 2	Sega	Sumo Digital	Stunning reproduction of a great arcade game
Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations	As comprehensive an online racer as you're ever likely to find
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House	An enjoyable and solid psychic blasting romp
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House	An essential update to the hugely popular Live game
Rallisport Challenge 2	Microsoft	Digital Illusions	Does everything you'd want from a rally game and more
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	In-House	Even better than the original, with a storming Live mode
Star Wars Battlefront	Activision	Pandemic Studios	A great game first, a great *Star Wars* game second
Thief: Deadly Shadows	Eidos	Ion Storm	*Splinter Cell* for the Middle Ages? Sounds good to us…

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

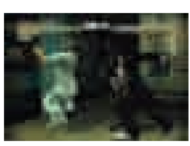
Project Zero
The sequel has finally made it to Xbox over here, but the original still has the edge as far as terrifying scares go.



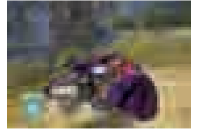
Burnout 3: Takedown
Still high on our 'most-played Live titles' list, thanks to a never-ending supply of losers… sorry, opponents.



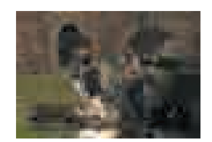
Def Jam: FFNY
It's not wrestling – it's brawling with style. Moving away from the ring has never been a better idea for Yuke's.



Halo 2
In hindsight, we're slightly disappointed with the single-player – so it's a good job that online play makes up for it.



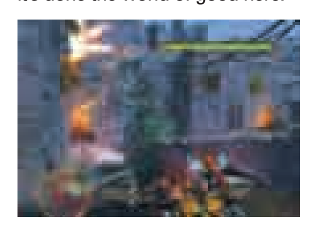
Rainbow Six: Black Arrow
Still good for a few rounds between other games, thanks to its pick-up-and-play nature. You can't beat *Rainbow Six*.





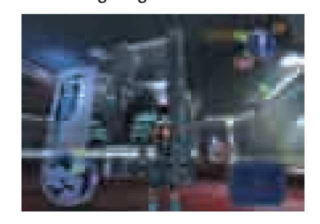
ODDWORLD: STRANGER'S WRATH

Pleasant surprises are always welcome, so we're pleased that the latest Oddworld game turned out to be great rather than just good. The change in style might rub fans up the wrong way, but it's done the world of good here.



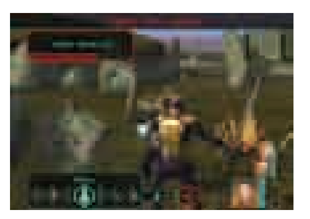
SCRAPLAND

Yet another surprising success here as well – although American McGee putting his name to it should have really given it away. Those of you looking for a fresh and interesting adventure with a robotic twist really should consider giving this a whirl.



KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II: SITH LORDS

More of the same? Perhaps, although considering the original was a BioWare classic, that's not necessarily a bad thing. If you didn't like that, though, then we doubt the sequel will do much to change your mind.

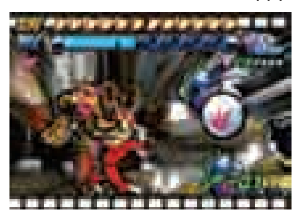


ESSENTIALS

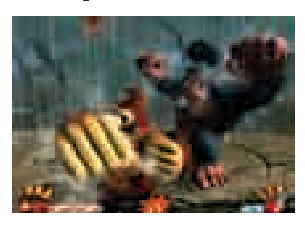
TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



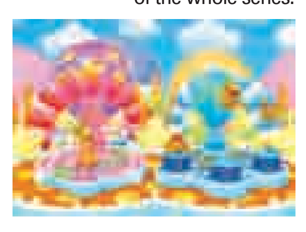
VIEWTIFUL JOE 2
So it's not exactly different from the original *Viewtiful Joe*… what do you care? Capcom's follow-up to the red-hot hero's adventures delivers as much challenge and excitement as before, so anyone who loved the first game is bound to be happy.



DONKEY KONGA: JUNGLE BEAT
A bizarre concept it may be, but Nintendo's decision to create a platform game that can be played with the *Donkey Konga* bongo drums is pure genius. What's more, it works – once you've got the hang of it, it's a bundle of fun.



MARIO PARTY 6
Sadly, it seems that Nintendo's genius isn't perfect – especially when it comes to drawn-out sequels to overly simple games. We like *Mario Party* as much as the next man… but, unfortunately, that man is bored of the whole series.





GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo
UK Launch Date
3 May 2002
Media
3-inch Optical Disc
Current Price £79.99

Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

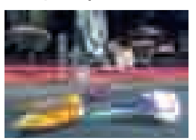
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year
Baten Kaitos	Nintendo	Namco	Sounds bizarre on paper, plays brilliantly in reality
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	Sega does it again with a brilliant retro remake
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume	Highly absorbing – the *Animal Crossing* of farming games
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	A grower, by all accounts – take your time and enjoy
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Nintendo	In-House	Another great 3D outing for our favourite female bounty hunter
Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems	Hugely entertaining and challenging at the same time
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House	More flowery fun for those of a patient disposition
Resident Evil 4 IMPORT	Capcom	In-House	Reinvention on a scale that brings the series back to life
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House	Not perfect, but still a very fine Mario adventure
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House	An absolute beast of an RPG that will dominate your life
Viewtiful Joe 2 IMPORT	Capcom	In-House	A fine return for our favourite side-scrolling superhero
Wario Ware: Mega Party Game$	Nintendo	In-House	A party game that'll have you rolling in the aisles
Zelda: Four Swords Adventures	Nintendo	In-House	The perfect excuse to have your friends round all the time
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	One of the many reasons to own a GameCube

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

Baten Kaitos
Niche in the extreme but still a hugely enjoyable RPG epic that'll keep you playing for a very long time indeed.



F-Zero GX
One of the few highlights of late that shows why we're still Sega fanboys, despite the Sammy, er, unpleasantness.



Animal Crossing
Want to come visit our village? It's full of weeds and probably needs some TLC, but we love it just the same…



Soul Calibur II
The best of the three versions – if not for the controls, then for the appearance of Link. Hurrah.



Zelda: Four Swords
Finally out in the UK, minus the *Tetra's Trackers* mode that we thought was great fun. Still, you can't win them all.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 2001
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £69.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

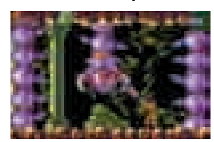
Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor IMPORT	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square Enix
Fire Emblem	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
Wario Ware Inc: Mega Microgame$	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Capcom

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

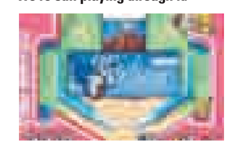
Golden Sun: The Lost Age
An RPG that's as in-depth as it is enjoyable – we just can't understand why it's not loved by more people than it already is.



Metroid: Zero Mission
A hark back to *Metroids* of old, despite using the advantages of the series' progress – a great mixture of the two styles.



Pokémon Pinball
Pinball is great; pinball with Pokémon in it by Nintendo is better. We've caught them all and we're still playing through it.



PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A
Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield Vietnam	EA	Digital Illusions
Call Of Duty	Activision	Infinity Ward
City Of Heroes	NCSoft	Cryptic Studios
Deus Ex	Eidos	Ion Storm
EverQuest II	Sony Online Entertainment	Ubisoft
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Football Manager 2005	Sega	Sports Interactive
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Valve Software
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	Novalogic	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Rome: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Firaxis Games
The Sims 2	EA	Maxis
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

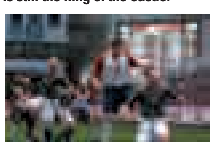
Joint Ops: Typhoon Rising
A high-point for online FPS titles, managing to dwarf even the likes of *Battlefield: Vietnam* – an achievement in anyone's book.



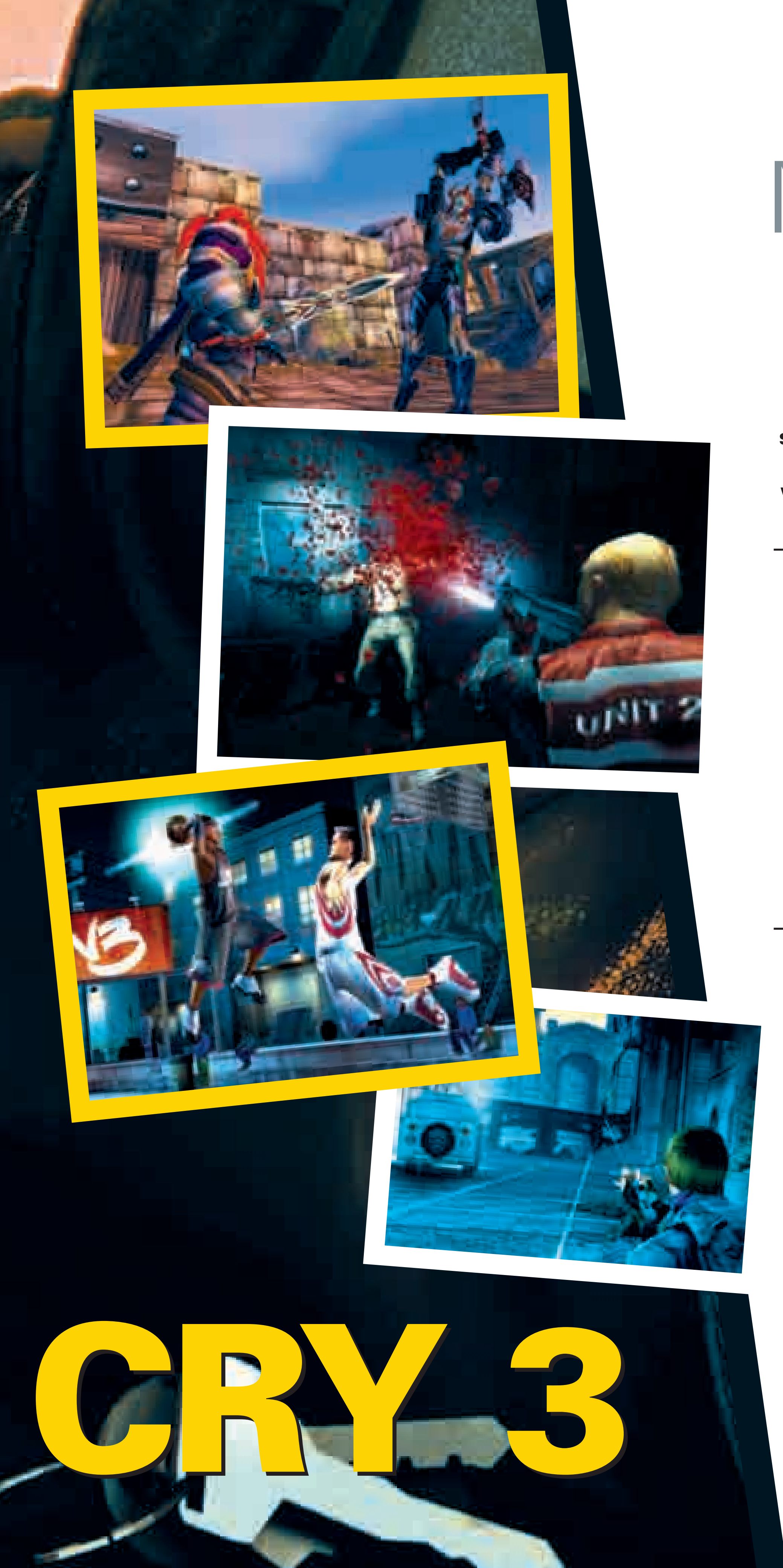
Rome: Total War
Romans – thousands of 'em. Don't shoot 'till you see the whites of their eyes, lads… or the tips of their spears, at least.



Pro Evolution Soccer 4
Whether it's better than the last one is debatable, but there's no denying that Konami's football title is still the king of the castle.




NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™
Forget the second game – that was a mistake, a mere hiccup on the road to greatness. Instead, Capcom would like to introduce you to the new and improved Dante – mad, bad and back for a third slice of the action. Excited yet? We'll have the full review…
180
PAGES OF DEMON-SLAYING EXCELLENCE
ON SALE 24 MAR 05
DEVIL MAY



NEXT MONTH

MORE… PREVIEWS

We're like ferrets here at games™ – not in the furry, toothy sense but in the way we try to root out new information on even the most secretive of games. With E3 drawing near, everyone's keeping quiet… but we'll have more games to show you than anyone else. Really, we will.

MORE… REVIEWS

March – it's the new December, at least according to our good friends in the videogame publishing industry. So prepare for a bumper crop of reviews coverage next issue as we present the likes of *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory, NBA Street V3, Brothers In Arms, World Of Warcraft, Rainbow Six: Lockdown* and plenty of other games we've most likely forgotten about.

MORE… FEATURES

Right – a guarantee. You know how we've promised you a look behind the scenes at Gearbox Software, the developer with its fingers in tasty pies like *Half-Life, Halo* and *Brothers In Arms*? Well, it's coming next month. You know how you want an extensive look at the future of the PSP and reassurance that it really will be a handheld to reshape your very understanding of portable entertainment? That's coming as well. Not to mention all the retro goodness that we'll have tucked away in these very pages – and you can take that to the bank.

Please note: Due to circumstances beyond our control, we can't guarantee that the next issue will actually contain all these things. But it will definitely have *something* in it. Probably words. And some pictures.

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think – this is where you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum?

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the browser window: **www.gamestm.co.uk**
You will arrive at the **games™** website. Nice, isn't it? Click on the 'forum' icon near the top of the page. If you're a first-time visitor to the forum you'll have to register before you can post. Just click 'register', fill in a few details (such as a username and password) and you're away.

Step Three:
Ha! There is no step three. It's that simple. Just choose which thread looks most interesting then post your deepest, darkest thoughts (preferably concerning gaming) in there. There's even a dedicated letters thread where you can post anything you'd like to see on these pages.

games™ reserves the right to edit letters for space and/or clarity. The views expressed in letters on these pages are those of the correspondents and not **games™**. If you want a healthy debate, we'll see you on the forum…

I HAVE A confession to make. I ignored the sage wisdom of my gaming peers and shunned the advice of your good selves and other luminaries in the industry and I committed a cardinal sin by going out and buying *GoldenEye: Rogue Agent*.

Okay, so I'm 37 and a High Court judge – who should know better – but it's a guilty pleasure! I want to be a rogue agent and engage in all manner of villainy in the Bond universe even though I know I'm only encouraging EA to release an equally crappy effort in six months time. Buying *GoldenEye: Rogue Agent* is a bit like weeing in a swimming pool – you know you shouldn't do it, but the idea seems so good.

I should point out that I've now traded it in and my games collection bears no trace of it (which is more than can be said for the wee in the pool).

Mike Smith

games™: We're sorry, but you committed a grave crime when you bought *Rogue Agent*. To be fair, plenty of people made the same mistake when they were taken in by a game that shamelessly borrowed the moniker of Rare's classic shooter. Surely that's the greater crime? Well, that and pretending to be a High Court judge…

AM I HAVING fun? This wasn't precisely the question that I asked myself as the joypad clattered to the floor last night in frustration, but it was something like it. I'd just been playing *Metroid Prime: Echoes*, you see. I'd settled down for a session that through the evening had seen me shouting and swearing at the telly on countless occasions. I'd been pushed to breaking point through a combination of fiendish boss fights punctuated by exhausting (yet ingenious) level design. Finally, after spending some 40 minutes battling against both the Spider Ball guardian and my short temper, only to fail at the final hurdle, I thought: where's the fun in this?

It's led me to thinking about how much pleasure I gain from gaming. Did I really enjoy

LETTER OF THE MONTH

LAST SUMMER, ON A whim, I exchanged my PS2 for a second-hand Xbox. I spent a couple of months happily saving the world from Covenant scum and pinging volleyballs around. However, after buying *Burnout 3*, my troubles began. The Xbox became less able to load and run the game. I checked out the disc and it was scratched to buggery – it also appeared to have done the same thing to *Halo 2*. So I went back to the game store and was told that this is a known problem with some Xboxes, and they advise people to buy new ones.

So I'm going to use your magazine to wish nasty things on games shop staff who don't give suitable warnings to bemused middle-aged types like myself. May their pierced bits heal, their facial hair fall out and their crappy French hip-hop CDs be replaced with Burt Bacharach ones.

Neil Tollfree

games™: We can understand your pain, but we're not familiar with this problem. Has anyone else suffered too? In the meantime, put your vouchers towards a new Xbox…



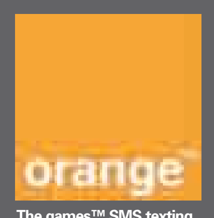
If you'd like to line your pockets with £100 of Gamestation vouchers then send us a games-related letter crammed with sparkling wit and pertinent points. Extra marks will be awarded for neat handwriting. Marks will be deducted for moaning about Nintendo.



SMS TEXT

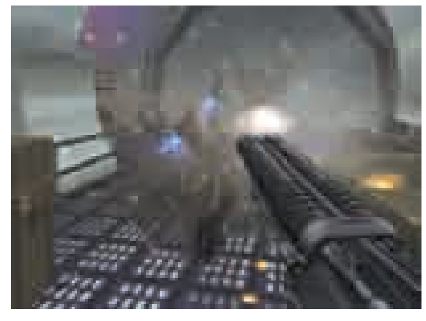
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"THESE SORT OF ADVERTS MAY **TITILLATE THE COD-EYED, IMMATURE**, MALE READERSHIP OF OTHER MAGAZINES, BUT I **BELIEVE** THEM TO HAVE **NO PLACE AMONG THE COSMOPOLITAN**, AND SENSITIVE READERSHIP OF GAMES™"



Haha! Look, everybody – it's *Rogue Agent*. Heh heh…



Now that's more like it. Aged, but still proper *GoldenEye*.

going through all this punishment? Sure, I can appreciate that the design of the game is fantastic, and there are some great moments that I've experienced so far, but how much fun is it to be in a state of stress when engaging in some of the boss encounters?

But what about other games as well? Did I really enjoy getting massacred time after time at the hands of that bloody shark in *Viewtiful Joe*? Was it that much fun to get such a pasting at the hands of the first boss in *Ninja Gaiden*? Whole days have been wasted levelling up in countless RPGs, just so that I can stand a chance against a secret boss character. And these lengthy wars of attrition lead to what? The reward of some item or weapon that, should I have received it earlier, would have negated the whole process anyway!

Even Xbox Live offers some frustration. Where's the fun in being cannon fodder for some American teenagers who can use a simulated sniper rifle far better than they can (probably) write? And exactly how much fun is it to memorise wave after wave of enemy attack patterns in shoot-'em-ups, or perform menial tasks such as jump 200 lightning bolts in succession (thank you *FFX*)?

The thing is, I don't know the answer to these questions. Perhaps somebody else can write in and help out here. All I know is that it's a curious pastime that we indulge in. I read a book, watch a film or listen to music for fun and entertainment. In gaming, I suffer at the hands of the designers for the sake of my pleasure, and for some inexplicable reason I keep on coming back for more. Perhaps, as gamers, we're all masochists. I've learned my lesson though, and it's this: you've got to be super-quick when activating those three bomb slots. I think I can do it, too – I'm just not sure that I'll have fun trying.

Martin Symons

games™: Without difficulty there would be no challenge, and without challenge there would be no point, surely? The thing about difficult bits in games is that eventually you overcome them, which makes you feel good, and which hopefully gives you some sense of achievement. Of course, if games no longer

CONTACT

ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think, this is where you lot get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry

Text Life

I'm in a GAME store and I've found Ty 2 for the XBox on sale. It's been reduced from £19.99 to £19.98! Bargain
games™: Go bargain hunters!

Video games r about the only thing Im good at & even so I dont always think Im that good. Im so sad I could cry. Y cant I get all the golds or plats in PGR2?
games™: Not being able to get all the Gold medals in *PGR2* is one of the qualities we look for in a Retro editor. So it's not all bad, eh? Dry your eyes, love.

Can I have a job please?
games™: Of course you can have a job – you can reply to all the text messages every month.

Surprised with your review. Killzone has me hooked. Its excellent. While my copy of halo2 gathers dust.
games™: They're only opinions to try to sort out the good from the bad. Surely you don't expect to agree with everything that's written in games™? We certainly don't…

M.bison is gay.
games™: We're glad that's been cleared up once and for all. Eh?

Make love 2 me!
games™: We don't do requests. Then again, how much are you offering?

With the impending release of further consoles r u gonna in crease the size of ur great mag 2 b able 2 include more, or just reduce what u already out in?
games™: If we did any more than 180 pages a month we'd probably explode.

Overhyped games like HALO 2 & KILLZONE really piss me off. XBOX PES4 is the best version by the way!
games™: Yeah, we hate over-hyped games too, we'd much prefer not to know anything at all about them before they're released.

appeal, why not try something else? Plant a hedge or build a dry-stone wall or something – same sense of achievement, but no boss fights and slightly more rustic charm.

I ONCE HEARD a quote that you can judge the readership of a magazine by the adverts it carries. So you can imagine how I felt as I skimmed past page 163 of issue 28. These sort of adverts may titillate the cod-eyed, mentally immature, male readership of other (so-called) games magazines, but I believe them to have no place amongst the cosmopolitan, culturally astute and sensitive readership of **games™**.

I thought we had already talked about these adverts in the past and agreed to never have them again. Come on, the money generated by having those adverts must surely be offset by the numbers of readers who must feel humiliated and ashamed to be implicitly associated with them by reading your magazine. Tell you what, fire your advertising department and get rid of those adverts for good and I'll buy two copies each month from now on to make up for it.
Jeremy Holmes

games™: We've had countless letters about this and all we can say is that we're sorry, but we had no idea these ads were going to appear in the magazine until it came back from the printers. We don't sell advertising space – all we do is write the wordy bits and source the screenshots and the artwork. We don't like phoneline ads either, but the decision is not ours to make. You can be sure, however, that we have made our thoughts about such advertising very clear those with the authority to make such decisions.

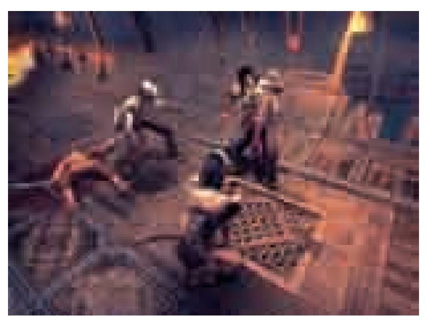


That Samus has been driving people mad with her Metroid problems. But isn't that the point?

I'M FED UP – and for once its not because EA is taking over the world. It's because of this new 'war' we can see raising its ugly head, and because us proper gamers have now got to sit and listen to mindless idiots shouting at each other over forums about which is better – the Nintendo DS or the Sony PSP. Put simply: both are brilliant.

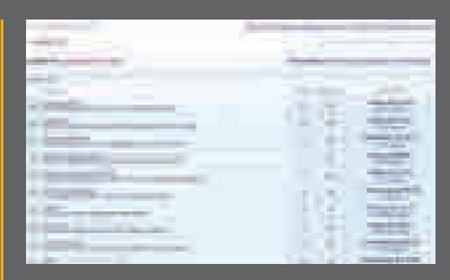
On the one hand you have the DS. It's innovative, different and boasts the class games that we've come to expect from Nintendo. On the other, the newcomer to the handheld arena, the PSP, is sleek, sexy and has some wonderful graphics – it really does justify the slogan 'Walkman of the 21st Century'.

And, like most new consoles do, each has some weaknesses. Nintendo's effort suffered from a poor launch line-up and numerous issues concerning dead pixels, and the PSP has been plagued by allegedly having an awful battery life and some 'UMD gun' issues. But together, both these consoles show how far we have come, and I honestly



Are games too difficult? Is there any fun to be had in constantly losing? Um, perhaps…?





FROM THE FORUM

DUCK AND COVER – THE NEW CONSOLES ARE ON THEIR WAY

"IN GAMING, I SUFFER AT THE HANDS OF THE DESIGNERS FOR THE SAKE OF MY PLEASURE, AND FOR SOME INEXPLICABLE REASON, I KEEP ON COMING BACK FOR MORE"

can't understand why people seemingly hate each other based upon a love of one or the other handheld.

I won't go on – after all there's only so long a person can listen to one rant on about other people's attitude. But next time you're about to make a single-minded comment about either the PSP or the DS, make an attempt to think about it first. Both consoles' strengths and weaknesses balance out to offer two brilliant pieces of gaming hardware, that – regardless of your preference – should be supported, not shot down by this dominant 'fanboy' attitude.
Mike Copus

games™: Well, that told everyone, and we fully expect everyone to live in peace and happiness from now on. Remember kids: it's all about the love.

WHY DOES EVERYONE fear the maturation of the games industry into a fully fledged business? Why must more money and big business be bad?

It happened in music publishing and film distribution, now all that money made by the mass-market/lowest common denominator crap helps fuel industries that also make the genuinely original stuff, that people like me enjoy. If the videogames market continues to grow as it has, then the demand for the *Ico*s and *Beyond Good & Evil*s of this world will also grow, making them more financially viable for new developers.

For example, take Microsoft. You can say what you like about Microsoft, but the Xbox is an excellent machine that's home to some brilliant and original games. It has challenged the dominance of Sony, forcing the company to be a little more creative, something that is evidenced by the EyeToy and *SingStar*, as well forcing Sony to produce more original IPs. Plus it's brought in Xbox Live – if Sony had been left to its own devices, online console gaming really wouldn't have evolved at all.

You will never see a return to the old days where a handful of people could produce a cutting-edge game deserving of your cash; these days it takes scores of highly specialised people with experience in their fields, and that can only come from investing a lot of cash and a mature industry that allows these people to hone their craft and develop new ideas.

You have to remember the games industry is just that, an industry. Producing highly original concepts that most people just don't get might be great for you and me, but not everyone wants that. As long as the industry is strong there will always be people producing the stuff we want to see, and that, my friend, takes money and big business.

If for every *Ico* there are ten *WWF* titles, let's have another hundred *WWF*s and I'll take the ten *Ico*s.
Jim Gallagher

games™: This is something we've been saying for a long time, but it's not just about balancing mainstream titles with more daring or challenging games that appeal to more eclectic tastes. While we'd like to see games developed to suit all ages, tastes and abilities, we'd also like to see that aim married to a greater pursuit of excellence. All too often, games are poorly realised and even bug-ridden, and that's unacceptable in a business that, as you rightly point out, is getting bigger and more powerful by the day.

Freewheelin' Franklin
Am I the only one who ever so slightly dreads the new consoles' launch? First, there's the unavoidable hyperbole and ranting by Reggie et al, followed by the high-price launch. You try so hard to avoid picking one up straight away, because the prices WILL drop SOON! The launch titles are usually pretty average and you just end up feeling hollow for having caved in and paid £300. Two weeks later, and you're back on the 128-bitters and your bank's just phoned 'cos you're over your damned overdraft limit AGAIN… Then you get news of the first price drop… Aaaargh!!

village
Tell me about it – the exact thing happened to me with the PS2. I was just left with a serious dent in my wallet, only to find out a week later that the dent would have been a lot less.

Tachikoma
PSone = £250, Fade To Black = £45. Yes, I had money at the time, and thought it was a good deal. It was probably the first and only time I ever felt stupid enough to buy something at launch.

Hong Kong Phooey
I can't help but get caught up in all the hype surrounding new consoles and get very excited at the prospect of new machines. I took a day off work for the PAL Xbox and GameCube launches, only to buy a US Gamecube three months later. I can remember quite vividly standing in a queue outside my local Game at 8am, patiently waiting to get my name on the pre-order list for a PS2. I think I was number five on the list. Go me! And then, a few days later, phoning Sony to ask why my new PS2 was making a funny grinding noise…

dangerboyjim
I don't see how the next gen is going to be that much better really. How much more power do we really need? (Handhelds excluded, they really do need more power?) I'm going to spend the money on a *Steel Battalion* controller instead and really spaz out! Woo-hoo! Then about a year down the line when the console war hits the second price-drop stage – only then will I buy one of the things.

CBx4
I got my PlayStation and PS2 a year after they launched. And managed to save £100 in the process. There was bugger all on the PS2 to tempt me at launch; *GTA III* was the game that prompted my buying decision. I only bought a GameCube when *Metroid* came out. I think I'm going to wait again this time. It can only be good for consumers with the next big three consoles (supposedly) launching so close together. Price war anyone?

Pedro Peppa
Agreed. Price fix, anyone?

**"This isn't good!
Let's go back! Let's go back!
Hurry!"**



